

**Minutes**  
**Town Council Finance Committee Meeting**  
**May 10, 2021**  
**Town Hall Annex and Via ZOOM**

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM.  
**Present:** Matthew O'Brien, Sr., Lisa Thomas, Richard Williams, Julie Blanchard  
**Also Present:** John Elsesser, Town Manager; Amanda Backhaus, Finance Director; Jennifer Rodgers, Mike Blouin and Ashley Gagnon, Girls' Softball Field Study Committee.

2. **Update: Softball Field Study Committee:**

Lisa Thomas made a motion to move up this item as the next order of business. The motion was seconded by Richard Williams and carried on unanimous vote. Matthew O'Brien said before we get to the actual report, he would like to go back to the first part of our charge, and what we've been doing since then is to get the other fields ready for play. Jennifer Rodgers gave an example to illustrate the challenges that they face: they got notification at 2 PM that they were being bumped from playing on the varsity field today in favor of a double-header game that got rescheduled to the field they were going to use. On a typical day that is not a problem, because they can use the middle school field, but it is unplayable because of the rain. Whenever school events are canceled, Rec is also canceled. They spent the entire afternoon calling umpires and trying to rearrange schedules. The field looks ok to play tonight, but the call to cancel was made by the schools at 11 AM when conditions were still very wet. It was a series of unfortunate events, but demonstrates why we need a field to call our own.

Jennifer moved on to the committee's report. She knows it was very lengthy, but she did that because sometimes things get lost in the shuffle, and she wanted there to be one PDF file with everything at their fingertips. Everything contained in this report has been sent before, some to the previous Town Council. Nothing has really changed since they presented their last report on March 7 to Finance. Some different numbers came through, and some concerns were raised, and she hopes they have addressed that as far as baseball parking is concerned, or mosquitos. They are here to present their findings and recommendations, and to answer any questions they may have in regards to our charge.

Matthew said that is not why he thought they were here. They all read the report, and there were a few questions, and he knows there are some things that are still outstanding. We will have to get supplemental information. If there are new questions, those can be discussed tonight as well. To be clear, there was a difference in pricing. Does the report they gave us include the new numbers? He thought it did not. Jennifer said it does not. It does not include the \$67,000 reduction in cost at the landfill site. Matthew said there are two projects – do they have costs for each? Jennifer said for field one, the cost would be \$170,000. Field two is \$212,000. Matthew said those figures are what he has. Jennifer said maybe Todd had updated it originally.

Matthew asked John Elsesser what the difference is between adding up the two fields. John said at some point you should have Todd come in. Matthew said he wasn't expecting to do all this now, but he did want to mention to everyone that there were some changes. John said there is a very modest costs for baseball parking. Jennifer said she was part of that meeting and the impact wasn't what Todd thought it was going to be. The overflow parking is not formalized, but she believes the cost is \$13,500. The informal nature of the current parking is very dangerous because people park at different angles. This would standardize it into diagonal spaces and it would look better too. Matthew said he attended their last meeting, where they mentioned they sometimes

have both girl's games and boy's games going on at the same time. He doesn't know what the parking needs are for both together. He thought they were always going to be different times. Jennifer said the idea is to all be together. Matthew said he needs to know parking for both. Jennifer said she believes they do have additional parking down there. She also suggested to Todd that the Miller Richardson football field could easily have a gravel path so that overflow parking could be sent to Miller Richardson. That could be a solution for safer and ample parking. Mike said the \$13,500 figure that Todd provided included 91 spots for baseball. Jennifer said we're not sure how many parking spaces the overflow grassy area has. John said 25 at most, but if a pick-up truck parks the wrong way it takes up five spots. Jennifer said the area is currently chaotic, cars fly down the area, maybe because it's Plains Road. There was some discussion of putting speed bumps there.

Matthew went through the other questions that were raised. One was whether one of the two fields could be a smaller size, providing different sizes for different age groups similar to the baseball fields. Mike replied that softball is played on a 60 foot diamond from age 5 through high school and into college, so the diamonds wouldn't be smaller. We were thinking a permanent fence, similar to the middle school, could be done so that we could still have the two fields, with a temporary fence like we have at the high school if we ever wanted to host an all-star game or tournament. John said the question is, could one of the fields have a shorter outfield. That would reduce the cost dramatically by not having to cut into the bank. Mike said his preference would be to have the two outfields back into each other. John said then they wouldn't fit there, because they have the same alignments. It is two fields facing the same way, going into the bank. If you can shorten one, otherwise one of the fields would be facing the cemetery, which we are trying not to do. Richard said you need one regulation with a fence if you are going to host any type of tournament. He asked how you do a temporary fence – he has never seen that. Mike said there are grommets in the ground, and they stay. The fence rolls up and you just put it around. Richard said what he has seen in Little League, and he assumes it would be the same for softball, is you put these fields so that they can interconnect. A lot of the times you have different age groups, so one age group is not even to hit the ball out of the mid-field – they just can't, so the outfield is really not used on a lot of those games, and they end up staggering the games differently. John said it depends on where it is and what the alignment is. In some places you can do that, and in other places you can't. What we call the major league baseball field, the alignment is all wrong. We wouldn't built that today.

Richard Williams said what he has seen that can be a problem is if you have a young person who is better than her age group and is hitting balls a long way, and then you're dodging softballs. John said you don't want outfield interaction – it is not great. Jennifer said the majority of our league is at the younger ages, where it would be ok to have a smaller field. We would have the same dirt field. Mike said if it's a matter of fields and fitting, it's acceptable to have a smaller field as long as one of those fields is 200. John said one would be a full regulation field. Richard asked why we would do that. We have fields all over this town. You create one field that would be correct, and then maybe you use the other fields throughout the town. It's not like there is a shortage of fields in this town. Mike said we would still have access to the school fields. Jennifer said she is not disputing the fact that we could have one field. Matthew said it would impact the numbers. Jennifer said it would be ideal to have the one regulation field, and then a smaller field. Ideally we would like to have two regulation fields, but we would be more than happy to have another field down there for the younger kids. That would be completely acceptable. Ashley Gagnon said the point of that is making sure we have one regulation field so we can do tournaments, and the other we can use for the younger kids. Jennifer said it is good when there is community – the older kids can help the younger kids, the younger kids can watch the older kids play, etc. Matthew pointed out at the meeting, there was pushback on this idea. He doesn't know

if their committee has all one view. Ms. Edmondson said we want two full-size fields, including that the boys could use it if they needed to. Jennifer said that is true. Mike said he doesn't want to speak for Bonnie, but he thinks her point during that meeting was if it's a matter of size, one big field/one small field is ok. It it's a matter of cost, let's do two. Matthew said we don't want to make a decision only to find out it's not a good idea later. We would like to know that upfront so we don't make mistakes. That's why we keep asking questions. Mike said if it's going to be a 200-foot field and a 130-foot field, or a 200-foot field and a 180-foot field. That's a world of difference. John said he doesn't think even the high school field is full regulation. Mike said it is – it's 200. Ashley said it is regulation.

Lisa Thomas said she wants to make sure, since there has been a lot of back-and-forth conversation, it is her understanding that if space allows in the gravel pit location, the preference of the Softball Field Committee is to have two full-size fields. But if space doesn't allow, then it will work if we figure out a way to have a regulation-size field and a smaller field. It's just a question of how much smaller that smaller-size field would be. John said to be clear, they will fit. It's a question of how much it will cost to get there. Lisa said she thought she heard in the conversation that two regulation-size fields might not work. John said they would fit, but you have to cut out a huge bank to get it to fit, and then you have a very sloped area which adds some other costs. Mike asked, according to the sketch he has, if you drive into the gravel pit area from South Street Extension, is it straight ahead that you have to cut into? John said both outfield, for both softball fields, you have to cut the bank down. You have to tier that all off. If you bring it back, then you're reducing that. Right now it's an un-walkable slope. You would have to walk out into the road, onto South Street Extension, which is a 20-foot road with gravel, which is bad. There is not a good pathway to try to do a sidewalk. To try to do a sidewalk up to the parking lot, the connectivity is not good. If you're changing the topography of that, and he hasn't talked with Todd about that, but the field closer to South Street Extension would probably be the full-size field. The other one, you're cutting much more into the bank. But before we spend any of our engineer's time of that, we need to know whether it is an acceptable option. Then we would need to see how much it would save. If it only saves \$5,000, then while you're there, just do it. But we don't know the order of magnitude. Jennifer said yes, we are willing to consider it.

Matthew said that DPW told us that baseball is not using the Snack Shack or bathrooms. He asked why. Jennifer said she believes COVID is a big factor. John said they don't want to clean them. Jennifer said that COVID is the main driver. They do have the porta-potties down there. It's hard to ask volunteers today, or at any time, to do that so they thought it was best. To work in the Snack Shack you have to deal with the public, and people are just not there yet. Baseball is opening to having a further discussion as far as working with Softball to join forces. We have talked about down the road having a brand-new, centrally-located Snack Shack. The current location is not so great. Richard asked for clarification. Jennifer said they are old. You can clean it as much as you want, but they need to be renovated. We are open to looking at that in the future. Porta-potties are the cleanest option right now. It's a lot to ask volunteers to serve the public when we're just sure about COVID. John noted there is supposed to be a representative from Baseball on this group. Jennifer said there was when we started in 2017. He was president, and resigned last year when his kids aged out. The new president has wanted to be involved and wanted to be kept in the loop on things.

Matthew said he had asked once the landfill project is complete, and proper venting is in place, noting that our landfill is 28 years old and usually 30 years is clean, whether it would be ok. There was fear and discussion early on, but he hasn't heard a determination. He knows they have done some research and asked if they would like to share it. Jennifer said they had done some research and it doesn't seem there have been any problems. There are huge places in New York

City on landfills. We would hope that the venting is done correctly and that there wouldn't be future issues on that.

Matthew said we talked about the swamp and whether or not we would have any issues with mosquitos or snow. He has zero information about that, other than the field is 70 feet from the swamp. Jennifer replied that mosquitos are an issue at any sports field. When we met with the WPCA, they had sent out a memo indicating that mosquitos were a potential problem, and flies and other things as well. It wasn't as much of a concern when we were moving forward with the WPCA property, but now that we're over at the gravel pit it is. If we are going to have a problem being 70 feet from the swamp, the average mosquito can go from 1-3 miles. If they're going to be at the gravel pit, then they're going to be at Miller Richardson. As a parent, anytime she is outside for soccer, softball, or baseball, she is prepared with bug repellent. It's one of nature's inconveniences. We deal with the rain and the weather. For us it's not a problem. She doesn't think Miller Richardson in general has a problem with it. It's just the nature of being outside. Lisa said we can also look at Tolland's baseball field at Crandall Park. The lower field is right on a huge wetland. They have put in bat boxes to help manage the mosquito population. In Willington at Hall Memorial School, their soccer fields are right on the river. There are complexes and fields all over the State that are near wetlands, rivers, lakes and ponds. Just like if you're going to go out for a hike, you're going to spray up. Those are things that can be managed, through things as easy as putting up some bat boxes.

Matthew noted that just because we are asking questions, it doesn't mean you should take it personally. We are looking for answers before making decisions. Jennifer replied that she doesn't understand why it wasn't a concern before. John said, with all due respect, Mike Ruff raised it as a concern because he didn't want people to complain about it. If you're closer to a swamp which has stagnant water, unlike a flowing river which doesn't really harbor mosquitos, when you're that close you're going to have greater numbers. The reason is, we had a 20-minute discussion at the last Finance meeting about Richard's family experience with mosquitos at baseball games. That was talked about because people have had those experiences. The issue was raised by an unaffected party who wanted to make sure you knew all the things. There was a laundry list of concerns, including smells and mosquitos. He just didn't want to get criticized later and wanted to be absolutely open. So that was carried forward because it was brought up by somebody else. Now you are closer to a known breeding ground. Richard said his son played pretty high-level baseball and traveled throughout New England on different teams. As you know when you go to different areas, mosquitos can be a real issue. It's not pleasant no matter how much DEET you've got on you. If that's an issue, then we need to think about it. John said we don't know. Ashley said we don't know that it's an issue. She would hate to spend all this time talking about mosquitos, but she thinks we know this could be an issue, so let's check into it. It would be great if we could get to our other questions on this list. John said instances of EEE are very rare but can be deadly. Perhaps during mosquito season someone should go down there for a while and see what it's like. Nobody knows if it's an issue. It's not warm enough yet. John said he has heard there is an odor issue in August because of swamp gas, but probably not worse than the WPCA site. Jennifer said she will volunteer to go down there. Perhaps someone from the Town Council would like to join her. Richard said he will go with her.

Matthew said the next question was about fundraising. The committee has indicated that their best hope for fundraising will be possible after a site is chosen, so they don't really have a lot to add right now. They have raised \$14,244 to date, but they believe that once they have identified the site that then they would be able to apply for corporate grants and other types of grants. And obviously the Town can look for other funds. Fundraising is an issue, and he is probably the one who started this. Over the years he has been on the Council he has seen the type of help that has

been provided to a lot of different organizations. The soccer people came and said they had raised \$60,000 – as opposed to saying build a field for us and then we'll raise money. That's the issue for him – how we do it, what are the expectations and can that be met in the future, and are we setting a precedent for other leagues to say we did it for girls softball and now we want this. He's not saying we're arguing; it's just a concern he has. He thinks it's valid to think about while we're making these decisions. He appreciates they will have a much better opportunity to raise money once we make these decisions. Jennifer said she looks forward to the day when we have a location and can get going on some of the ideas we have. It's just very difficult to approach a corporation to support this idea when we don't know where it's going to be. Having a location makes it more manageable to get the buy-in from the community. She thinks a lot of people think it's never going to happen. Once we have something tangible it's a lot easier to ask for the buy-in. Mike said that the Little League also does a lot of grants for new fields in under-served communities. While Coventry as a whole isn't really an under-served community, the girls in Coventry are an under-served group. Jennifer said even a lot of small grants can add up quickly. We're willing to put in the work.

Richard said he wants to see this happen, because it was one of our goals. He is a big proponent of sports. He watched what it did for his child, and it's great. It's just what do we need, and doing it right. We have a lot of fields in this town, and what do we really need? Do we need one field, or two fields – it's like this grand plan to have a bunch of them, but maybe we really only need one, and then use everything else that's around. Mike said today we have access to three, and we had to cancel four games. Richard said that happens in every town. Mike said he doesn't know of any other town who canceled their games today. Richard said someone called to cancel, and that's how baseball is. Mike said tonight we had fields that were playable but we can't use them. Richard said that's right, but it's like that everywhere. Mike said in other towns, if school games get canceled, they can still play on their Rec fields. Richard said so what do we need. Jennifer said we need a field for the girls. It's not a complex that we're looking for. We're looking for a field. When we ask the public to support this in a referendum, or however we're going to ask for their support, we need to be really honest about what our ask really is. Our ask is to have a field. If she was an average citizen of this town and saw a complex, she thinks of the grandiose design with press boxes, etc. Maybe that's fine down the road, but right now our ask is for a field, so she does ask that when the time comes, that the rest of you understand we're not looking for a complex. We are looking for a place to call home. A place to put our banners up. A place have sponsors to keep our costs down. Our umpires cost \$65 per game. We have to turn that into a registration fee. Fees go up every year. It's getting very expensive to play the sport, especially if you have multiple kids. We try to keep our costs as low as we can. We ask that the word complex comes off. Matthew said just for everyone listening, we talked about whatever comes from the Council will be a new presentation and will be worded specifically to what we approved. What would go to referendum would be what we're actually voting on. It would be very clear what it includes and not anything else, so it wouldn't be misleading. Mike said we actually really want a backstop and a fence where we can hang sponsorship signs. Matthew said if we don't do an outfield fence, they would want a fence along first and/or third base lines to hang banners. Mike said if you go to Miller Richardson and look at their fences, you see all of these signs that they have sold for \$250-\$500 a week. Then it's \$1,000 to be on the scoreboard, and how many names are on the scoreboard. That's a lot of registration fees with 130 girls in the league.

Matthew said eventually he thinks the decision for the Council will be choosing between two sites. He thinks it's good if we get the numbers, because right now the landfill is 30% cheaper. Originally he thought, and he may still think so but is not sure, that the landfill was a good site because everything is right there. You get a little more bang for your buck because it's right there already and we're going to do the landfill project and if we tie them together there might be a

little savings. He wants to be clear and that's why we keep asking questions about the numbers. He assumes we're going to go forward, and eventually there will be a vote. Jennifer said we should have the numbers if it is not done in conjunction with the STEAP grant venting project, because she thinks there would be a slight difference that would have to be worked out. Matthew said it probably wouldn't impact the first field. There is approximately a \$100,000 difference, and we can't count on fundraising up front, so those are things we have to think about. It's unfortunate, and maybe it's because we're not all experts, but we ask a lot of questions that citizens may ask and it's important for us to be able to answer those questions because then we're going to be able to sell the project.

John mentioned the timing of the STEAP project, which is still unknown. We have been waiting and waiting for the Attorney General's office to release a new contract. Every STEAP contract in the State is in the same situation. Although it is a constitutional appointment and not his employee, the Governor's office is now getting calls encouraging them to get involved to try to help move things forward. Regardless, he fully expects that project will be complete by fall, and a softball field could certainly catch up to it. The topsoil and grass will already be there, so it may be you just have to cut out the infield and put up a backstop. Theoretically that could be done by October. The cost differential of not putting in the field at the same time is approximately \$30,000. Matthew said it depends on how much you decide to put in. If it's all the pieces, he thinks it's \$30,000.

Matthew asked if anyone had additional questions. The other Finance Committee members thanked the Softball Committee for putting the detailed report and background documents together. Jennifer said she knows it is lengthy, but if additional new information becomes available, they will just add it to the existing report so that it is all in one place. Matthew said there are a few more pieces to be included that we are getting together. Richard said it will be nice to get this done. It's been on the back burner for a long time. Jennifer mentioned the importance of doing this for all the young girls that are looking up to us, and we appreciate your help. Matthew mentioned all the drainage work that was done to get the middle school field in better playing condition, and that it was ironic if it was not playable today. Jennifer said two years ago, it would probably not be playable tomorrow either, and she is grateful for the work that has been done. Mike said he wanted to mention something about the soccer league being able to raise \$60,000. Soccer came with both boys and girls. We came with just girls and have been able to raise \$14,000, and we're hoping we'll bring more. Matthew said that was just one example – he thinks we went through 10-12 years of review for support of various projects.

**3. Acceptance of Minutes, April 12, 2021:**

Richard Williams moved to accept the minutes of April 12, 2021. The following corrections were requested:

- Page 1, Item C, Finance Director's Report, second bullet: add the word "collections" after general fund. Sixth line: add "during the storm response" after vehicle usage.
- Page 1, Item C, Finance Director's report, fourth bullet, fourth line: change "...\$406,000 in the prior year" to ... "\$406,000 at the end of the prior year."
- Page 2, Item E, Board of Education Fiscal Reports, second line: change "that the February reports were received" to "only the reports up to February were received..."
- Page 3, third paragraph, first line: change "...gotten the profit and loss" to "gotten the most recent profit and loss reports..."
- Page 4, Item 2, fourth line: change, "that can't be by grant fund" to "that can't be paid for by grant fund..."
- Page 4, item 5, fourth line: change "assessment center" to "assessment process"

- Page 5, item 6, second paragraph, 11<sup>th</sup> line: add “of pavement” after “two inches”
- Page 6, second paragraph, last sentence: change “The” to “They”
- Page 6, item 7, 7<sup>th</sup> line: change “have the field” to “have a basic field”
- Page 7, second paragraph, 10<sup>th</sup> line: change “which is now 30 years old” to “which is almost 30 years old”

The motion to accept the minutes as corrected was seconded by Lisa Thomas and carried on unanimous vote.

#### 4. Reports:

A. **Committee Chair – Matthew O’Brien, Sr.:** no report.

B. **Committee members:** No reports.

#### C. **Finance Director: Amanda Backhaus:**

- Tax collections are at 100.33% of anticipated property tax revenue for the year. That is excellent news since we have two months left.
- The total general fund revenues are at 99.71%.
- We did receive our final ECS payment at the end of April. It is \$60,000 over our budgeted amount. That has to do with the true-up of the Special Education grant. That was good news. Revenues in general have been very strong.
- Encumbrances and expenditures are at 84.27%. The same period last year saw total expenditures and encumbrances of 85.01%.
- We do have some transfer requests for later on in the agenda. We will be working with department heads to do transfers within their department budgets. We have funds to cover most of those. The transfers requested tonight are for things that are in excess of department transfers.
- Board of Education expenditures are at 74.72% of their approved budget, which is slightly down from the prior year. Matthew asked if those expenses include all of their COVID expenses. Amanda does not know, but she believes that is just their general fund, so that would include COVID expenses not funded by grants. COVID expenditures funded by grants should have been moved.
- COVRRRA is at 99.29% for collections, so on the revenue side we should be right where we expected to be. Expenditures are slightly over budget due to the increased costs for the year. Matthew asked a question – the report shows it dropped from \$190,000 to \$170,000. He was trying to figure out if the \$80,000 (for the STEAP grant match) is included. Amanda said it is not included. Matthew said that would drop it to \$90,000. He is projecting that we will have to raise fees again. John said we went forward with a budget that said at least 10.
- The sewer fund is also doing well. Collections are great. Matthew asked to clarify that they budgeted to lose over \$300,000. Amanda said yes. They had capital projects of \$350,000 that they expected to take from fund balance. They’ve been saving up for that. Those have not been spent yet – they are encumbered but she doesn’t think they’ve actually started yet. They do intend to use up to \$350,000 for clarigester #1 and the first set of pipes that need to get realigned. John Elsesser reported that camera survey work has been done which indicates minor leaking, so their concerns were validated and the timing is good.
- The Recreation current balance is -\$109,000. Her projection is that we will come back a little bit and be at -\$95,000. Camp is going to be starting and registration money will start coming in. We have had to start spending some money now to get camp ready. This does

not include any American Rescue Plan money that we might choose to allocate toward this. There is a hopeful future of restoring this fund.

- A new chart was added on page 6 to provide an EMS Fund balance analysis. In this year's budget that was just approved, we greatly increased the transfer in, in part to help cover the costs of the 24/7 ambulance coverage. She wanted everyone to be aware of how badly this fund is doing. In 2020 we started to have that big decrease and was in part because we switched to the 24/7 coverage in March of 2020 with COVID. The expenditure side for the ambulance fund is not looking good right now. Even with the increase we put in the budget, that will have to continue increasing going forward unless we reevaluate our ambulance services or find another way to bring money in. Overall our collection rates are not terrible, it's that Medicare and Medicaid reduce our allowable amounts that can be collected by almost 60-70%. Amanda and Jim have been reviewing the accounts that have not been collected on a monthly basis, and if we know that their insurance company gave them money, we are sending them to collections regardless, to make sure we are maximizing our collections. Matthew asked if we will end the year at a deficit. Amanda said yes. He asked if that will come out of the general fund. John said no. Amanda said it sits in a separate fund being negative, and our financial statements will disclose that we will fund it with future revenue sources. It is something to be concerned about, especially because the capital reserve line, our budget that was approved to spend was \$175,000 and that will reduce it. That's what the capital reserve fund is for, and we've been diligent each year to put money toward the new ambulance, which is what we should have done. It's really the operational side of things. John said it may be something we add to the Rescue Plan discussion. Matthew said we talked to some of the members of the fire department and they are no longer doing fundraising. Someone suggested that maybe the Town could send out a letter on behalf of the fire department. John Elsesser said yes. Amanda said we could tell the fire department that we would like to do a mailer and they wanted to write something up we definitely could. You'll notice the donations this year are higher. They actually gave us their money from the plant sale. Matthew said maybe something could come from the town. He gives every year and hasn't gotten anything for at least two years. There are people in town he is sure would contribute. Amanda said she will talk with Jim McLoughlin.

#### **D. Monthly Finance Reports:**

Matthew noted we still have a tax assessment loss of \$175,000 for crumbling foundations.

Matthew asked to verify whether there is a mistake on the unencumbered report. The balance went up after the expenditures. Amanda said she put them in the wrong way. The correct balance should be \$388,502.

On the monthly reports, Matthew noted that some accounts are at 100-102%. The tree warden line was noted as needing attention. Proposed transfers will be discussed later in the meeting. Amanda said next month we should have a much cleaner-looking report. Matthew noted the CNREF remaining balance is \$252,517. We may be talking about additional allocations going forward. Under revenues, John noted we had two very unique things happen in the Town Clerk's office. We had a 490 pay-off. When people do a 490 they get a deduction over a period of years, but they took it out early, so we received a pay-off of \$29,600. On Dollar General, the developer sold the property to Dollar General, so we receive a conveyance tax in the range of \$20,000-\$22,000.

- #### **E. Board of Education Fiscal Reports - March 2021:** Matthew said he didn't have a lot to discuss regarding the most recent reports, but he did notice that COVID salaries went up by

almost \$50,000. It seems like with people getting vaccinated we should be going in the other direction, so he doesn't know what's going on with that. Amanda said we actually had more absences this past month at the Town Hall for COVID-related exposures, because people have been going out too soon and getting exposed and then they have to stay home and quarantine for 14 days. It's very frustrating. The same thing could be happening on the Board of Education side. John said we actually had offices closed last week because people were out for vaccines, or reactions to the vaccines, or exposure to COVID. Matthew said there may be more questions when we have a chance to review the Board reports. Right now they are projecting a balance of -\$70,000.

The grant fund was discussed. Amanda said that the Board has a grant fund, and the Town has a grant fund, so the CRF money went into our grant fund. We gave them half of our CRF money on December 31. They should have done a journal entry to take the costs out of their operating fund and give them to her so that she would have them in her grant fund. Richard asked if that happened. Amanda said she believes so, but she doesn't see the journal entry listing. Matthew said it's hard to see on the management report. Richard asked how she tracks it. Amanda said he provided her with a list of costs in excess of what she was looking for, because she wanted to be sure they were eligible for her CRF grant, because she has that responsibility. Her understanding is they did make a transfer back in December to reduce their expenditures by \$47,613. Matthew said he is going to want to go over these items in detail. There is also mention of the CIP in their financial report. Right now, as of February, the available balance in the food service fund is \$133,643. The account is not a static thing that we can project.

1. **Board of Education Fiscal Reports - March 2021:** Amanda noted that we do not have these reports yet, due to the way the Board's Fiscal meeting calendar is scheduled. They are not meeting until this Thursday. We should have those reports Friday and will email them.
2. **Discussion/Possible Action: Recommendation to the Town Council to Release the Hold On The \$99,999 In Funds Currently Held in the COVID Educational Expense Reserve Fund:** Lisa Thomas moved to release the \$99,999 in the COVID Educational Expense Reserve Fund, per the request of the Board of Education. Richard Williams seconded the motion. Matthew read the conditions of the reserve fund aloud to clarify the purpose of this fund, which was made from the Town Council's 1.5% fund. The purpose was to provide funding during the current fiscal year for the Board of Education to meet extraordinary and un-budgeted expenses incurred during the 2020/21 school year that cannot be met by funding in the Board's approved budget, or other grant awards or other savings. He is mentioning this because in the minutes of the fiscal committee they said it is cumbersome as to how they would qualify for those funds. He would like the record to be clear that it is not either of those things in his opinion. The motion to release the hold on the \$99,999 in funds held in the COVID Educational Expense Reserve Fund carried on unanimous vote.
3. **Board Of Education Correspondence/Response to Questions of the Committee:** Matthew said he wanted these questions to be re-stated, because we have not received any answers prior to this meeting. This item will be carried forward to the next agenda.

**F. Consideration/Possible Action: Year-End Transfers FY 2020/21:**

Amanda Backhaus provided an overview of the year-end transfer requests. She believes most departments will be able to cover their overages with savings in other lines, and she expects them to do so. She will be meeting with department heads this month. There were three lines she identified that need to be covered from other areas. We did have some savings in our workers compensation insurance this year. We had a zero percent from the prior year, plus three percent salaries. We had a couple of high level salaries drop off this year, so we did have some savings there. She would like to use those savings to fund her IT line, the legal line, and Town Hall postage. IT had some extra expenditures this year. We had to convert all of our computers from Windows 7 to Windows 10, including the firehouses, which hadn't been touched in quite some time. It was a security issue. Legal is just through the roof, between the investigations that were done at the beginning of the year and a public works grievance that significant time was spent on. In postage, given COVID we have increased the number of mailings that went to homes, including assessment data, voter information, dog licenses, etc. Richard Williams moved to recommend the transfers to the Town Council as proposed. The motion was seconded by Lisa Thomas and carried on unanimous vote.

Amanda mentioned an additional item she would like to discuss at the next meeting. In terms of IT licenses and support, we had that cyber-security issue with the Board of Ed back in March. It made us evaluate our current anti-virus solution and we have determined it is not adequate. We are looking at another product that is better and also has a managed aspect. She expects it to bring it to the Finance Committee for the June meeting agenda. Whether we ask to take it out of Contingency or the Council's 1.5% fund is not yet determined, but she is working with the Board of Education and wanted to let them know it is pending. John said it could be significant, because we are looking at buying a three-year license which will be a lot cheaper in the long run. Amanda said we will also have the bill from the cyber security company that came in to assist us, which we pay 25% of. That may sway whether we are able to do a one or three year license.

Matthew said he would really like to have our Finance meeting before the first Council meeting in June, because there are so many issues we have to deal with before we set the mil rate. John said we also just got details about the American Rescue Plan, so we have to spend some time looking at details and coming up with a plan for consideration. There are going to be so many options. Matthew said the most critical decision is whether we are going to apply funds to this year's budget, because that will affect our general fund. John said the funds will be distributed in two rounds, so we will need to have a general idea of what our priorities are. Amanda noted there is no regular Finance Committee meeting in June. We have a joint meeting with the Board of Education on the 14th. A meeting confirmation for early June will follow. John said it is likely we won't know what the State budget will be at that time. They are starting to say there will not be a State budget this year. They will not meet their statutory deadline. We are hoping that the Appropriations Committee will hold small towns harmless, or come to a formula where no town loses more than \$50,000. There is a lot of positive revenue coming into the State, the question is how sustainable it is. Matthew said it is all to be determined, but asked if we could write a letter in support of that position. He thinks we should do something formally as a Council. John said yes and asked if it should be sent to everyone. Matthew said yes, including the Governor because he is on our side in this too. John said we should acknowledge that he did this to stop the negative impacts from COVID. John said he will send it to the staff members that he knows.

**G. American Rescue Plan Update:**

Matthew said there was a virtual Federal Government Treasury update meeting tonight that

he got shut out of. Amanda said she was shut out too. Matthew said he got there five minutes ahead of time but was still unable to get in. Amanda experienced the same issue. They reached maximum capacity with 1,000 attendees. Matthew said additional meetings are pending. John said the CCM meeting is May 28. He would recommend getting on that one. Amanda said in reviewing the update today, she thinks the Treasury update is not going to be useful for us. They are announcing the use of a portal for the majority of states and towns to submit. As a non-entitlement town, we don't use that portal. John said he made it halfway through the full report that the Treasury came out with, and at the end of that the eight-page summary pretty much covers it, so just read the eight-page summary. The Treasury's guidance is as permissive as he has ever seen a federal document. What we may base budget decisions on appears to be very solid. We are hopeful that the Recreation staff re-hiring seems crystal clear. Amanda said we are hopeful that ambulance recovery will be included. Police overtime was not specifically mentioned. There are many different ways to use this money, and it is up to the Council to determine what their community priorities are. At the end of this month we are supposed to get the costs for the school ventilation project, and that's going to be big. You have a lot of requests for economic development. There is a request for one percent for arts. There are business support things, and tourism support things. There is a whole section on direct payments to people. He doesn't think we qualify for that. It refers to a qualified census district and he looked that up and we are not. Mansfield and Willimantic are. South Manchester is, but not most of Manchester. There is a section where you can try to make an argument but it sounds like that would be very difficult for us. We may be able to target things like giving money to the fuel bank to give to people, utility disconnection fees, etc. through social services. There are a lot of issues on mental health, especially for families and kids, so some contracted mental health support may be important. Those are all going to be policy issues. He will put together a memo for that meeting. Matthew said the other thing to consider as we move forward is that there may be other money available for infrastructure, so we may need to consider how we apply for each category of funds. That's why it's good we don't have to make a decision quickly. John said realistically the infrastructure funds would be the second year. We're not going to be ready for it, and there might be some school grants that go toward that, too. Matthew said there's more school money in the third round, too. People should be aware that there's more considerations than just looking at the ARP. John said it's very broad, which is a good thing so that communities can decide their priorities. That lands on you, and it does discuss that there should be some community input. It didn't specify that there should be a public hearing, but he thinks they wanted you to have some level of community input.

#### **1. Avery Shore Road Turnover:**

Matthew said we got a statement from the attorney (Rich Roberts). John said he focused on the betterment assessment. He sent that on Friday, so we just sent it out. He hasn't had a chance to discuss it with Rich. There are ways to do betterment assessments. He is not sure if the Council is going to want to do them or not. The issue is we have to know where the road is, and we don't know where the road is. We need him to go further into both questions. The association retains the rights to the road. The question is, if they transfer those rights to us, does that mean that some of these issues go away. The report was updated by Public Works, obviously as the road got older, it got worse. He needs to go down there with Bill (Watkins) and Todd (Penney) to look at whether we can take over a section. There's public argument for us to repair those catch basins, some of which have really shallow sumps. The purpose of those sumps is to allow the water to settle to get the solids out. Right now, if it's shallow and there's a lot of turbulent water, that water with the solids suspended is going into the lake. There would be a policy argument that we should fix the drainage. Matthew asked if normally the lake association would be responsible for the drainage. John said normally the

lake association would be responsible. All of the other ones on that side of the lake, except for Actors' Colony which is across South Street from there, have turned over their roads to us. Planning and Zoning would have to go to the Council to levy an assessment for the whole association depending on the map. At some point in our next round of bonding, we are probably going to fix the sewer roads, so maybe we can add a section while we are there. If they had given us the roads in the first place we wouldn't even be talking about this, because we'd already own it. He is sure there's a path to do something. Matthew said the biggest thing what specifically needs to be done and how much it is going to cost. He knows the Steering Committee is dealing with their legal issues too, because there are other points that have to be resolved before we can decide on the final numbers.

**2. Adjournment:**

Lisa Thomas moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:52 PM. The motion was seconded by Richard Williams and carried on unanimous vote. A date for a special Finance Committee meeting in early June will be determined, so the committee can prepare recommendations for the full Council at their meeting on June 7.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Stone  
Council Clerk