

**Board of Selectmen
Special VIRTUAL Meeting
March 8, 2021**

MINUTES

Present: First Selectman Dan Jerram, Selectman Alesia Kennerson, Selectman Laura Garay, Administrative Assistant Christine Hayward; Special Guest Michael Caselas, Director at Foothills Visiting Nurse.

Continued Discussion of Proposed 2021-2022 Budget

Mike Caselas thanked the Selectmen for inviting him to be present at the meeting this evening and providing him with a chance to explain the services that Foothills Visiting Nurse provides. FVNA recently merged with VNA Northwest of Bantam in January of 2020 and merged with Salisbury Visiting Nurse in August of 2020. The name has now changed to Visiting Nurse and Hospice of Litchfield County. This organization provides nursing services to all towns in Litchfield County and 3 towns in Hartford County – Burlington, Canton and Hartland. Smaller, non-profit independent operators found it difficult to compete with the larger entities; therefore there were mergers. Hartford Healthcare took over the Visiting Nurses of Connecticut operating out of Torrington and Bridgeport. There is a shortage of nurses to provide homecare services. Mr. Caselas stated that Farmington Valley Visiting Nurses may serve some patients in the area, but referrals have been steady for Foothills. The merge has allowed the economies of scale to be a benefit to the organization.

Mr. Caselas gave a brief history of the origin of the relationship between Foothills and the Town. He stated that in 1973 New Hartford ended their public nursing program and signed with Foothills to provide that service. Mr. Caselas explained that Foothills offers services to all New Hartford referrals regardless of their ability to pay as long as New Hartford continues to provide funding. Mr. Caselas stated that the agency provides health guidance to those who no longer qualify for Medicare. Mr. Caselas stated that New Hartford is getting a tremendous amount of value for their contribution. Selectman Kennerson asked for specifics of services provided to residents. Mr. Caselas stated that 110 individuals in New Hartford were served by Foothills last year. Those individuals included Mr. Caselas stated that homecare visits were still performed during COVID. PPE was used and there were costs associated with those needs. Paycheck protection funds were used to keep employees employed during the pandemic. Mr. Caselas noted that the funding given by New Hartford to the agency has decreased over time, yet Foothills continues to be available for resident's needs. He said that New Hartford provided \$34,000 in funding in 2002, yet it was now only \$15,000 in 2020. Selectman Garay asked what does Foothills do that the health district doesn't? Mr. Caselas answered that the health district does not provide nurses. Mr. Caselas stated that he had been told that all towns need to provide public health for their residents and Foothills provides that service. Mr. Jerram interjected that the health district is the entity that satisfies this requirement. Mr. Caselas stated that if there is ever an individual who has a health care need, he is available to see what can be done. The Selectmen thanked Mr. Caselas for joining them this evening.

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The Selectmen reviewed the proposed 2021-2022 budget. Mr. Jerram stated that he has spoken with Superintendent Murphy to get some final figures for the revenue page. The pass through grants will see an overall reduction. Special Education reimbursement will decrease. A new rental agreement has been reached with Oak Hill; there will be a slight increase. First Selectman Jerram stated that the CARES act funding amount is still unknown. Selectman Garay stated that Congressman Larsen's aide is expected to give her some information regarding the anticipated funding. As soon as she hears what that is going to be, she will contact Mr. Jerram and alert him to what to expect. Due to the uncertainty of the amount to be received, the Selectmen felt comfortable leaving \$13,344 as a placeholder for the CARES revenue.

Mr. Jerram asked the Board if they would agree to increasing the Senior Van line item by \$3,000. This would reflect an increase in both wage and usage. Selectman Kennerson asked what the hourly wage would increase to. Mr. Jerram replied that the current wage is \$17.00 per hour and he would recommend increasing the wage to \$18.50 for the next fiscal year. He stated that the driver is excellent and should be fairly compensated before we lose him.

Selectman Kennerson asked what the West Hill Pond Association is seeking for funding. Mr. Jerram replied that there is a request for \$15,000. This is an increase over last year. Mr. Jerram replied that currently the proposed budget is an increase. He would prefer that the West Hill Pond allocation remain at the same funding level as last year. Ms. Kennerson disagreed, stating that their request should be penciled in and adjustments can be made later, if needed.

Parks and Recreation does not need any changes.

The Regional Refuse Budget will increase due to tipping fee increase. MIRA issues continue to drive the budget up. Jerram commented that there will most likely be an increase in the sticker prices for RRDD access.

First Selectman Jerram expressed his concern that the legal line item in the Zoning legal and professional department is underfunded. Jerram asked the board members if they might want to consider adding \$5,000 to the zoning legal and professional line item at this time. Jerram stated that there is a lot of consultation occurring with the Town Attorney for various issues and consideration should be made to increase the Planning and Zoning legal and professional line item. (Selectman Kennerson left the meeting at this point). Jerram and Garay increased the line item to \$30,000.

The highway department has \$14,000 for summer roadside mowing. Ms. Garay asked why the salary for the Highway Superintendent is not broken out on its own. Jerram replied that it never has been; it always has been in the same line with all of the highway crew members.

Public Safety was the next area of review. The Resident Trooper costs have been received and \$175,958 has been entered into the line item.

The Deputy Fire Marshal line item was a bit higher last year due to training; but now that the Deputy is completely trained and has moved into the role of fire marshal. This line item can go back to \$500.00. The Burning Official line item might need to be adjusted up a bit in order to cover the costs accurately. Burning has increased in the past few years and it might be wise to bump it up to \$2,000. Garay agreed.

The Ambulance Association request is similar to last year. Ms. Garay stated that there may be a request next year from the Ambulance Association for additional funding for equipment.

The Selectmen reviewed Assessor salary line item. Mr. Jerram stated that he has adjusted that line item to have a 3.75% increase and extra funds for incentives when completing various stages of training. The Tax Collector had a mid- year bump in salary due to gaining autonomy; and she will receive the annual increase in July just like all of the other employees. The Assistant to the Town Clerk will require some training. Therefore, the First Selectman recommended that additional funding be put into training.

Town Attorney line item should be increased due to the fact that there will be additional expenses incurred for the work that will need to be done to complete the sale of the water and wastewater assets. Jerram recommends increasing the line to \$27,000.

Jerram noted that the budget is at a 4.14% increase with the adjustments just made. The Selectmen acknowledged that this is their wish list and that there will most likely need to be reductions made.

MOTION: by Jerram to approve the proposed budget created this evening to the Board of Finance budget workshop on Saturday, March 13; seconded by Garay.

Unanimous

Request for Tax Refunds:

MOTION: by Garay to approve the four requests for motor vehicle tax refunds totaling 561.93 as recommended by the Tax Collector; seconded by Jerram.

Enterprise FM Trust	\$259.68	Motor Vehicle Overpayment
Alan Goldberg	\$137.83	Motor Vehicle Overpayment
Daniel Helt	\$8.43	Motor Vehicle Overpayment
USB Leasing LT	\$155.99	Motor Vehicle Overpayment

Unanimous.

MOTION: by Jerram to adjourn at 6:37 PM; seconded by Garay.

Unanimous

Respectfully Submitted,

Christine Hayward, Administrative Assistant

No attachments