

**BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING
&
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
ASPETUCK BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

April 8, 2024

Subject to change until approved by the Board of Directors.

Present at the Hearing were: Chairman Paul Shaum, Vice Chairwoman Catherine Revzon, Director Paul Fonteyne, Director Ilisa Nussbaum, Director Collins voted yes, Director Edward P. Mally, and Mark Cooper, Director of Health. Present via Zoom was Director Edward P. Mally.

There were no members of the public present.

Chairman Shaum called the Public Hearing to order at 7:04 PM and asked Mr. Cooper to read the Notice of the meeting.

Mr. Cooper read the Notice: *Notice, Budget Public Hearing and Regular Meeting of the Aspetuck Health District to be held in the Health District Conference Room, 180 Bayberry Lane, Westport, Ct. 06880 on Monday, April 8, 2024, at 7:00pm. There will be a Budget Public Hearing on the proposed Aspetuck Health District Budget for the fiscal year 2024 - 2025, which begins July 1, 2024. The Public Hearing will take place on Monday, April 8, 2024, at 7:00 PM. Immediately following the Budget Public Hearing there will be a Regular Meeting of the Aspetuck Health District Board of Directors. Sincerely, Mark A. R. Cooper, MPH, RS, Ex-officio, Secretary Treasurer.*

Mr. Cooper noted that the Notice has been posted with the Town Clerks of Easton, Weston and Westport, the Health District's website since 4/4/24. A Public Notice has been run in the Fairfield Citizen with run dates 3/22/24 and 3/29/24, and the Norwalk Hour with run dates of 3/25/24 and 4/1/24. He also noted that the Health District's budget has gone through each member town's budget hearing process, which he has attended to present the budget, and answered any questions. All three member towns have accepted the budget.

Chairman Shaum asked Mr. Cooper to summarize the budget request. Mr. Cooper noted that the town assessments have not changed since being discussed by the Board and presented to the towns of Easton, Weston, and Westport. Each town has already accepted their public health assessment. An additional expenditure category has been added reflecting the estimated cost of finding and hiring a new Director of Health before April 1, 2025. The expenditures have been offset by an increase in grant funding.

The proposal is a maintenance budget with a 4% increase in each town's assessment. The increase is needed to cover the increased costs of electricity, heating oil, and staff all impacted by inflation. Finding qualified staff continues to be an issue across the state with the majority of local health jurisdictions looking for the same personnel. This year's budget was prepared better aligning the various expenditure items in the same categories as the auditor uses. This has helped reduce the number of year-end adjustments from the previous audit.

Mr. Cooper noted that the total budget with the transition costs is \$1,951,037.

Chairman Shaum noted that there were no members of the public present and asked if Board members had any questions relating to the budget. Hearing none, he declared the Budget Public Hearing closed at 7:07pm.

The Regular Meeting was called to order by Chairman Shaum at 7:08 pm.

The following voting Board Members were present: Chairman Shaum, Vice Chairwoman Catherine Revzon, Director Paul Fonteyne, Director Ilisa Nussbaum, Director Collins, and Mark Cooper, Director of Health. Present via Zoom was Director Edward P. Mally.

Also, present was Mark A.R. Cooper, Director of Health

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Shaum asked if there were any other comments on the March 11, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes.

Director Mally noted that on the bottom of page 3, the last two paragraphs are a carryover from the February minutes. Mr. Cooper indicated he would look into it and make the necessary corrections.

On a motion made by Director Mally, and seconded by Director Fonteyne, the Board voted to approve the March 11, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes as corrected. Chairman Shaum voted yes; Vice Chairwoman Revzon voted yes, Director Nussbaum voted yes, Director Collins voted yes, Director Mally voted yes, and Director Fonteyne voted yes.

Motion was approved 6 to 0.

Communications

Mr. Cooper noted that the letter dated March 13, 2024 that had been sent to the CT Medical Assistance Program requesting changes to the Health District's Master User agreement was redated April 1, 2024 and emailed back to them after the CT Medical Assistance Program called to say the letter they received was not signed. Mr. Cooper indicated he was holding a copy of the signed letter in question when talking to them on the telephone and told them he would put another date on the letter, scan it and email it to them. Apparently, the CT Medical Assistance Program had copied the faxed letter which lightened the signature to the point of being almost unrecognizable.

Also in the Board meeting package is a letter from Valerie Seiling Jacobs, addressed to the Westport Planning and Zoning Commission about the dangers of PFAS compounds in artificial turf. In a telephone call to Mr. Cooper, she had indicated that she might attend the May meeting to discuss her concerns. There was general discussion on Westport's use of artificial turf fields.

FY 2024 - 25 Budget Discussion and Action

Mr. Cooper summarized the proposed budget as a maintenance budget with an increase of 4% increase in each member town's assessment, due in large part to inflation increasing the cost of electrical, heating and staffing costs. Budget expenditures were increased to reflect the potential costs of hiring a new Director of Health and having some transition time. Director Forteyne asked if the proposed transition cost assumptions reflect the potential maximum overlap. Mr. Cooper replied yes, they are estimates and the final cost is somewhat controllable by the Board. Director Forteyne asked whether the Health District's fiscal reserves were sufficient to cover unexpected costs, Mr. Cooper indicated he believed they were. Mr. Cooper reminded the Board that by Statute the budget needs to be approved by April 13th of each year.

On a motion made by Chairman Shaum, and seconded by Director Nussbaum, the Board voted to approve the proposed FY 2024-25 Budget as presented and discussed with revenue and expenditure totals of \$1,951,037. Chairman Shaum voted yes; Vice Chairwoman Revzon voted yes, Director Nussbaum voted yes, Director Collins voted yes, Director Mally voted yes, and Director Fonteyne voted yes.

Motion was approved 6 to 0.

Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Letter

Mr. Cooper noted that Chairman Shaum, Director Mally and staff have been working with members of the of Community Research Consulting group to finalize the Community Improvement Plan. One of the last steps is to prepare a summary letter from the Board that will be at the beginning of the report. The draft letter included in the Board Meeting Package was a collaboration between the Chairman Shaum, Director Mally, and staff.

Chairman Shaum indicated that there was a very lengthy meeting going page by page through the draft Community Health Improvement Plan identifying a number of corrections, suggestions, reconfigurations on how the report should be presented, he is hopeful those changes are being made. Mr. Cooper indicated that it is his understanding that most have or will be. It was thought an introductory summary letter at the beginning of the report would be helpful for the readers understanding of the many charts and tables.

There is a section on education with a lot of national and state statistics that was sent to the superintendents of the local schools covered by the Health District to see if there were any objections or suggested additions to any of the data presented. There were none.

There was discussion on what action was needed, and whether the Board needed to vote on the content of the letter. Mr. Cooper suggested that no formal vote is needed, a consensus of the Board would be acceptable, what he needs is the Chairman's signature on the letter so it can be sent to the Community Research Group for inclusion in the report.

Director of Health Report

Mr. Cooper summarized the Operational and Permit Activity reports for March. He indicated that there were no surprises in any of the numbers, there is a slight increase in the number of permit applications being submitted from the previous month. Director Forteyne asked if the permit application level has stabilized to the pre-COVID levels, with the addition of Easton's activity. Mr. Cooper responded that pre-COVID applications averaged about 100 plans per month. With Easton joining, he estimates that it should be about 120 plans per month. The current activity level is now about 150 plans per month, still a lot for 2 staff members to handle, both the review and associated field work.

Director Forteyne asked about an applicant's waiting time. Mr. Cooper indicated that it is longer than what staff or the applicant prefers, roughly 3 to 4 weeks depending on the complexity of the application and whether an applicant has all the information necessary at the time of submittal.

There was discussion on the it takes time to process applications from the information needed to complete a review. It is not unusual for there to be revisions, the plans go back to the design engineer who may take a week or so to resubmit, and then goes back into the queue. Also discussed was the number of site inspections that need to be conducted to ensure compliance with the State Health Code provisions. It is not one and done, each site might require several visits. Staff are expected to be thorough and document the system's installation, a mistake on the Health District's part could create costly liability if a septic system fails prematurely.

Part of the issue is scheduling on part of the installer who is supposed to provide up to 48 hours before the start of an installation so that staff can plan their inspection time accordingly. Rarely is adequate notice provided, most call the day before they want a final inspection. Mr. Cooper indicated this puts a lot of pressure on the 2 staff members reviewing, approving, and inspecting the applications.

Board members reviewed and discussed the Comparison of Environmental Staffing Levels and Permit Application Activity for Area Public Health Jurisdictions in FY 21-22 table and AHD tally sheet of local inspections noting that AHD staff review many more applications than others, the same or fewer number of staff. Mr. Cooper stated that the only way to reduce the time it takes to process an application from beginning to final inspection, while ensuring compliance with State Codes, would be to hire another inspector. Mr. Cooper noted that the Health District used to have 4 inspectors doing compliance work prior to the COVID 19 pandemic.

Because of the shortage of qualified inspectors across the state, there was general discussion on whether an inspector could be found and at what cost. The consensus of the Board was that if a qualified inspector could be found at a reasonable cost to improve the Health District's service level, hiring another inspector would be considered.

Chairman Shaum indicated that he would like to discuss the Director of Health transition and hiring process. On a motion made by Chairman Shaum, and seconded by Director Fonteyne, the Board voted enter an Executive Session to discuss personnel. Chairman Shaum voted yes; Vice Chairwoman Revzon voted yes, Director Nussbaum voted yes, Director Collins voted yes, Director Mally voted yes, and Director Fonteyne voted yes.

Motion was approved 6 to 0.


At 8:01 Chairman Shaum declared the Executive Session over and the Board resumed the regular meeting.

Chairman Shaum asked if there was any other business to come before the Board.

Hearing none, on a motion made by Director Nussbaum, and seconded by Director Collins, the Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 8:02pm. Chairman Shaum voted yes; Vice Chairwoman Revzon voted yes, Director Nussbaum voted yes, Director Collins voted yes, Director Mally voted yes, and Director Fonteyne voted yes.

Motion was approved 6 to 0.

Respectfully submitted.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Mark A.R. Cooper". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Mark A.R. Cooper Director of Health
Aspetuck Health District