EAST HADDAM BOARD OF FINANCE
Special Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, May 5, 2026 – 7:00 PM
Meeting Room 3

Participating: Joseph Corbett
Debra Denette
Maureen Goff
Scott W. Jezek
Harvey Thomas
Absent: Eric Kolasinski

Others: V. Belles; T. DeBrito; T. Gelston, L. Zemienieski; other members of the public

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Goff called the meeting to order at approximately 7:00 PM and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. Guest and Audience Comments

There were no guest/audience comments raised at the meeting.

3. Correspondence

Ms. Goff reported receipt of an unsigned letter addressed to members of the Board of Finance and Board of Education regarding possible staff reductions within the school budget. Board members noted that staffing decisions are within the purview of the Board of Education and that unsigned correspondence could not be verified as originating from a town resident.

The Chair also reported receiving correspondence from the Board of Education Chairman regarding recently approved additional state education funding.

Discussion followed regarding:

- The status of potential accounting changes related to Board of Education contributions;
- The need for possible ordinance or policy changes if accounting procedures are modified;
- Timing concerns given the ongoing referendum process.

4. Approval of Minutes

Approval of the minutes was deferred to the next meeting.

5. Chairman's Report

a. Liaison Updates

Ms. Denette reported visiting town departments including the Tax Collector, Assessor, and Parks & Recreation offices. No issues were reported.

Mr. Jezek noted sending informational correspondence to committee members and indicated that further activity would likely resume following the budget referendum.

b. Board Subcommittee Reports

Communications

The Board discussed distribution of the Citizens Guide in advance of the budget referendum. Members commented positively on the informational material and noted that it had been widely shared.

Long-Range Capital Improvements Committee

Extensive discussion occurred regarding long-term municipal facilities planning, including:

- Potential construction of a consolidated library facility;
- Firehouse facility needs;
- The possibility of reducing the school system from three schools to two due to declining enrollment.

Board members discussed:

- Existing unused school capacity;
- Potential repurposing of school buildings for other municipal uses;
- The need for coordination among the Board of Finance, Board of Education, Board of Selectmen, and planning entities;
- The existence of a prior school consolidation study that may need updating.

Ms. Goff stated that an official inquiry could be sent to the Board of Education requesting information regarding any consideration of school consolidation and any existing studies.

Financial Policies

Discussion focused on several policy-related topics including:

Financial Outlook Process: Members discussed improving and publicizing the Board's financial outlook reporting process.

Capital Project Reporting: Board members discussed establishing regular capital project reporting, including:

- Quarterly reporting recommendations;
- Budget-to-actual expenditures;
- Project status updates;
- Explanations for significant variances or reallocations.

Finance Director Belles noted that existing reports could be adapted into a regular reporting cadence.

Department Metrics: The Board revisited discussion regarding departmental performance metrics and how metrics may help evaluate taxpayer value and departmental effectiveness during future budget deliberations.

c. Audit Discussion

The Chair and Finance Director reported ongoing discussions with the town auditor regarding delays in completion of the FY 2024-2025 audit.

Discussion included:

- Outstanding Board of Education fund reconciliations;
- Delays caused by staffing transitions and the budget season;
- The auditor's anticipated June issuance timeline;
- Concerns regarding future financial consequences if the audit is delayed further.

The Finance Director explained that:

- Financial statements are being built while awaiting final Board of Education figures;
- The auditor requires additional review time once information is submitted;
- The audit firm offers a task-management system to improve accountability and tracking.

Board members expressed concern regarding the lack of communication from the Board of Education regarding audit progress.

Discussion also included:

- Potential formal correspondence to the Board of Education requesting completion of outstanding items by a specific date;
- Possible attribution of additional audit costs resulting from delays;
- The need for improved coordination going forward.

Ms. Goff indicated that she would contact Board of Education leadership directly regarding the outstanding items and expected timeline.

6. First Selectman's Report

The First Selectman arrived later in the meeting and provided the following updates:

Road Program - The town originally planned to pave Maple Avenue, Great Hillwood Road, and East Haddam-Colchester Turnpike using bond funds; however, major stormwater drainage deficiencies were identified on those roads. As a result:

- Drainage design and infrastructure work will occur first;
- Paving of those roads is expected next year;
- Four roads in the Hadlyme area will instead be paved this year.

Traffic Safety - The First Selectman reported continued speeding concerns throughout town. Portable speed-monitoring devices are being rotated throughout the community in response to resident complaints.

Police activity from March 1 through April 30 included:

- 38 traffic stops;
- 3 infractions issued;
- 29 written warnings;
- 6 verbal warnings.

Ambulance Service - The First Selectman reported ongoing discussions regarding ambulance service operations. Another working group meeting was scheduled for May 18 with key stakeholders.

7. Finance Director's Report

a. YTD Financials

The Finance Director reviewed February and March year-to-date financial reports. Key points included:

- Expenditures were below projected levels for the fiscal year to date;
- Several significant year-end expenses remain pending;
- Revenue collections were tracking favorably.

Board members discussed:

- Intergovernmental revenues;
- Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funds;
- State grant classifications;
- Casino funds and local capital improvement funding.

8. Old Business

Lake Hayward Dam

Mr. Thomas reported that the Lake Hayward Property Owners Association approved a special assessment to help fund dam-related needs.

Discussion included:

- Fundraising efforts among non-association property owners;
- Comparisons to state-owned dams in the region;
- Clarification that the state does not own the Lake Hayward Dam.

9. New Business

a. Appointment of Auditor

The Board discussed reappointing CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA) as the town auditor.
Discussion included:

- The benefits of continuity given recent staff turnover;
- Concerns regarding audit delays;
- Possible future competitive bidding;
- The value of maintaining institutional knowledge;
- The possibility of using different personnel within the firm to provide “fresh eyes.”

A consensus emerged supporting:

- Reappointment for the upcoming audit year;
- Pursuing a formal bid process in the future once audit timelines stabilize.

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to appoint CliftonLarsonAllen as the Town of East Haddam auditor for the July 1, 2025 through June 30, 2026 audit year. Mr. Corbett seconded the motion. Mr. Jezek voted nay and the motion passed by a majority of ayes. Motion carried.

10. 2026-2027 Budget

a. Set Mil Rate (providing referendum passes)

Motion made by Mr. Thomas to establish the mill rate for the fiscal year 2026-2027 at 28.67 mills representing a budget of $43,841,297.00. Ms. Denette seconded the motion.

There was a general discussion concerning anticipated state legislation that may contribute additional funding to municipalities which would potentially lower their mill rate. The Board discussed that the legislation had not yet been signed and town attorneys were still reviewing the language of the bill before any determination could be made regarding allocation of the funds.

Mr. Jezek recommended the Board wait to see how the legislation impacts the Town's budget before setting the mill rate. There was consensus that the mill rate should be set early enough to give the Tax Collector time to get the bills mailed out.

Mr. Thomas withdrew his motion and Ms. Denette withdrew her second.

b. Continue deliberation on 2026-2027 Budget and Set Future Meeting Dates (providing referendum fails)

Discussion of this agenda item was not required.

11. Adjournment

Motion made by Ms. Denette to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Goff seconded the motion and it was approved by unanimous ayes. Motion carried.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 8:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Debra Denette
Recording Secretary