TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance – Regular Meeting
January 12, 2026
Municipal Office Building – Room 1 & 2
Via Zoom and YouTube Live

Participating:

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

Others: Dr. T. DeBrito, Superintendent; E. Dill (BOS); J. Moreau; T. Sevigny (BOS); T. Gelston, First Selectman; K. Thompson (BOE), M. Ziobron (BOE); Mr. S.Trojan (BOE), and other members of the public

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Ms. Goff called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

TRI-BOARD MEETING, 2026-2027 PROPOSED BUDGET – BOARDS OF FINANCE, EDUCATION, AND SELECTMEN

a. Review and Discussion – Ms. Goff welcomed members of the Boards of Selectmen and Education to the FY2026-2027 Tri-Board meeting. She provided opening comments and reflected on why East Haddam is such an exceptional town. She strongly encouraged the public to participate in the FY2026-2027 budget development process and provided information on where information on the budget workshops can be found.

Ms. Goff stated that it is a fiscal reality that aid from the state is expected to remain flat this year and that the Town's Grand List is experiencing stagnant growth. She noted that any increase in spending will lead to higher property taxes and asked the Town departments, the BOS, BOE, and other Boards and Commissions to exercise restraint when drafting their budgets. She further stated that the BOF had provided guidance that it is not prepared to approve any increases over the current fiscal year's budget.

Ms. Goff advised that it is the BOF's goal to maintain a responsible mil rate while continuing to deliver high quality services.

First Selectman Gelston provided a presentation on the Town's zero-based budget process and stated that it is the BOS's goal to minimize the effects of inflation on Operating and Capital costs. He reviewed the BOS's budget workshop process and stated that they "welcome and appreciate" public participation.

He reviewed details about the following key components of the Town's budget: Public Safety, Economic Development, Staffing, and Capital Projects. He stated that the key cost-drivers of the budget include inflation, contractual wage increases, energy costs, the new firehouse, tree trimming & removal, and road repaving.

Mr. Gelston advised that the BOS's areas of focus are the Village redevelopment, a master plan for Moodus, broadband, a road repaving plan, and improving community assets.

Superintendent DeBrito provided comments on the BOE's vision for the school district. She stated that the Elementary School continues to be designated as a School of Distinction, has increased 16 percentage points in the area of 3rd grade English Language Arts, and 10 percentage points in 3rd grade mathematics.

Dr. DeBrito reviewed highlights of presentations put together by each school's administration. She noted that some of the Elementary School highlights include renewal of a multi-year contract for a science platform, mandated screeners for assessments of students in grades K-3, and the increased cost for supplies. She stated that the Elementary School has a commitment to field trips; however, there are no new initiatives, programs, or staffing included in the budget.

Dr. DeBrito reviewed the Middle School presentation's highlights, including continued support for community driven initiatives, increased costs for transportation and officials in the athletic programs, and subscriptions to supportive platforms for classroom instruction and early intervention. She stated the Middle School is updating its music program and noted that the enrichment programs are being shifted away from the Pupil Services budget. She further reported that a Medical Detectives (bio-medical field) curriculum is being added to Project Lead the Way.

Dr. DeBrito provided an overview of the High School's presentation on budget priorities, including increased participation in Advanced Placement (AP) courses, noting that the BOE pays for AP exams, expanded their engineering technology program, the addition of several new field trips, and additional furniture for the library.

Dr. DeBrito noted the High School expects decreases in custodial and administration expenses and increases in budget items such as the cost of transportation and officials for athletic programs and the general cost of utilities.

The Superintendent reported that, collectively, the schools reduced their overall budget requests by $20k; however, she anticipates that Pupil Services budget (tuition) will increase. She stated that the overall drivers of the BOE budget are salaries & benefits, transportation, tuition, and the general cost of utilities and noted that the FY2026-2027 BOE budget has not yet been adopted.

BOE Chair Thompson stated factors negatively impacting their budget are a $500k increase in health insurance benefits and a $300k increase in Special Education costs. She also noted that the cost of transportation is a significant unknown because the BOE has not gone out to bid for over 10 years. She advised that the overall increase to the BOE's proposed budget is less than 5% while the statewide average increase is 5%-10%. She confirmed that their budget is not yet final and that the Superintendent has not yet proposed any cuts.

Ms. Thompson stated that they are operating at "bare bones" and that the BOE is balancing this year's budget largely due to retirements that occurred in 2025. She noted, however, that the reduction in staff has also led to several programs being discontinued, such as World Languages in the Elementary School and French in the Middle School.

Ms. Thompson encouraged the community's strong support for the BOE budget.

b. Guest and Audience Comments – Mr. Jay Moreau thanked everyone for the work they are doing on the budget. He stated that taxpayers have absorbed sizeable increases over the past few years and noted the potential impact of the upcoming property revaluation.

He called attention to a $15M expense for a new fire house and $3.5M for new fire trucks and stated that the Fire Department "cannot have it all". He encouraged the BOF to be open to alternative opinions regarding the Fire Department's requests.

Mr. Moreau acknowledged the high cost of education but implored the BOE to find cuts in their FY2025-2026 budget because many citizens are already struggling to pay their taxes now and cannot sustain another increase. He wished the BOF, BOS, and BOE luck with their budget work.

The Board of Selectmen and Board of Education adjourned their meetings at 7:33 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence discussed at the meeting.

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APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of December 8, 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes – Ms. Goff called the Board's attention to the December 8, 2025 draft minutes in their meeting packets. The following corrections were noted under New Business, (a) East Haddam Ambulance Association discussion: Change "Stephanie Burr" to "Stephanie" and "Ms. Burr" to "Ms. Pare".

There being no other changes to the minutes, the December 8, 2025 regular meeting minutes were accepted as amended.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

Ms. Goff stated that she did not have any additional items to report on at this meeting.

FIRST SELECTMEN'S REPORT

First Selectman Gelston provided the following report:

- The Public Works' Driver-Laborer position has been filled; however, the Road Crew Foreman position is still vacant.
- He briefly addressed the speeding issue and stated that the Town is investigating funding options to purchase a new speed monitor. They are also working with CT DOT to get warning signs about speeding installed at each of the Town's entry points.

- Two workshops with the EHAA and EHFD had been conducted and the participants have drafted an agreement that will be reviewed at their January 15th workshop.
- A contract for a new cell tower at 440 Town Street is being discussed and negotiated. If successful, it would represent a new source of revenue for the Town.
- A Black Birch Golf Course Feasibility Committee will be established at the next BOS meeting. The Town has a full list of volunteers and the draft charge had been updated to include a requirement that the committee assess whether or not there is a sufficient quantity of water available for irrigation of the golf course.
- The Town is making plans for the country's will 250th birthday in July 2026. They are also considering Middletown's invitation to participate in county-wide parade. He requested that citizens who would like to help the Town in planning and fundraising for the celebration should call the First Selectman's office.

FINANCE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

a. YTD Financials - Ms. Belles called the Board's attention to the year-to-date financials in their meeting packets. She stated that the transfer of Capital Savings Project did not carryover to the Summary page Revenue Sources. She responded to questions from the Board and Ms. Goff noted another error on the Summary page. Ms. Belles stated she will correct the report and redistribute it to the Board.

b. Audit Update - Ms. Belles reported that the auditors will be on-site next week. Their immediate priority will be finalizing the Town's budget since a good bit of information needed from the BOE is still outstanding. She stated that she will file with the state for another extension by the end of January.

Ms. Belles responded to questions from the Board and stated that she does not anticipate filing the audited financials until February or March. She noted that on January 14th she is meeting with the auditors and representatives from the BOE to go over the BOE's outstanding deliverables.

In response to a question from the Board, Ms. Belles advised that issuing an RFP now would be hampered by the fact that they could not provide responding CPA firms with the Town's FY24-25 audited financials. She also noted that having a history of late audits is not viewed favorably when going out to bid. She stated that although January-February is the ideal time to issue an RFP, she expects she will have to wait until the end of March or April, after the Town's audited FY24-25 financials are filed with the state, to issue an RFP. In response to a request from Ms. Goff, Ms. Belles agreed to update the Board on the FY25 audit timeline.

There was a brief discussion about several outstanding Annual Reports.

In response to a concern raised by Mr. Jezek, Ms. Belles advised that the 10% of municipalities that are delinquent in filing their audited financials with the state is based on towns and cities that have exceeded their allowable extensions. There was a general discussion concerning what impact filing late with the state will have on the Town's borrowing ability.

In response to questions from Mr. Thomas, Ms. Belles confirmed that there has been a plan to get on track with timely audits using her step-by-step audit plan; however, the resignation of the BOE's Business Manager in April interfered with her ability to complete many of the steps.

In response to a request from Ms. Goff, Ms. Belles agreed to add a "Review of the Audit Checklist" under the Finance Director's Report on the BOF's monthly agendas.

OLD BUSINESS

a. Budget Calendar – Ms. Belles called the Board's attention to the FY26-27 budget calendar in their meeting packets. She provided a high level review of the overall calendar and reviewed the BOF workshop dates.

In response to a question from Mr. Thomas, Ms. Belles confirmed that the Citizen Guides include language stating that it is not the BOF's intention to entertain any dollar increase in the FY26-27 budget over the current year's budget.

NEW BUSINESS

a. Grant Acceptance – FY26 Historic Document Preservation Grant – Ms. Goff stated that this is an annual grant to the Town. In response to a question from Ms. Denette, Ms. Goff confirmed that the BOF had updated it grant policy to eliminate the need for the BOF's approval to apply for grants of less than $15,000.00; however, all grants still need to be formally accepted by the BOF.

Motion made by Ms. Denette to accept a grant in the amount of $5,000.00 from the State of Connecticut State Library, entitled "FY 2026 Historic Document Preservation Grant", (revenue account 26041-43000 and expense account 26041470-53615) and request the Board of Selectmen to schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Jezek seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

In response to a comment from Mr. Jezek, Mr. Thomas stated that he hopes to have the Financial Policies Sub-Committee meet soon to discuss a policy for developing a Long Term Financial Outlook for the Town. He stated that he believes the policy should include requirements for departmental performance metrics and he distributed a list of potential metrics for the members' consideration. Mr. Thomas recommended adding Mr. Jezek to the Financial Policies Sub-Committee.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Mr. Kolasinski to adjourn the meeting at 8:19 p.m. Ms. Denette seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
Debra Denette
Secretary