Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
January 12, 2026
Special Tri-Board Meeting Minutes

Board of Selectmen Members: Todd Gelston, Erik Dill, Thomas Sevigny

Board of Finance Members: Joseph Corbett, Debra Denette, Maureen Goff, Scott W. Jezek, Eric Kolasinski, Harvey Thomas

Board of Education Members: Terri Garrity; Jessica Hatfield; Thea Jansky; Kiera Thompson, Stephen Trojan; Melissa Ziobron

Others: Valerie Belles, Finance Director; Michael Callahan; Dr. Teresa DeBrito, Superintendent: Jay Moreau; Linda Zemienieski, Executive Manager and other members of the public

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance: Mr. Gelston called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

   The Boards of Finance and Education also called their meetings to order.

2. Tri-Board Meeting 2026-2027 Proposed Budget–Boards of Finance, Education and Selectmen

   A. Review and Discussion: Ms. Goff provided opening comments for the Board of Finance 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 Board of Selectmen, Board of Education, and other Boards and Commissions to exercise restraint when drafting their budgets. She further stated that the Board of Finance 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 Board of Finance'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 Board of Selectmen's goal to minimize the effects of inflation on operating and capital costs. He reviewed the Board of Selectmen'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 Board of Selectmen'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 Board of Education'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 their budget.

Dr. DeBrito reviewed the Middle School presentation's highlights, including continued support for community driven initiatives and subscriptions to supportive platforms for classroom instruction and early intervention. She stated that 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 Board of Education pays for AP exams, expanding 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 the Pupil Services budget (tuition) will increase. She stated that the overall drivers of the Board of Education budget are salaries & benefits, transportation, tuition, and the general cost of utilities. She noted that the FY2026-2027 Board of Education budget has not yet been adopted.

Board of Education 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 Board of Education has not gone out to bid for over 10 years. She advised that the overall increase to the Board of Education'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 Board of Education 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 Board of Education 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 an estimated $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 Board of Finance to be open to alternative opinions regarding the Fire Department's requests.

Mr. Moreau acknowledged the high cost of education but implored the Board of Education to find cuts in their FY2026-2027 budget because many citizens are already struggling to pay their taxes now and cannot sustain another increase. He wished the Board of Finance, Board of Selectmen, and Board of Education luck with their budget work.

3. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Mr. Sevigny, to adjourn the meeting at 8:33 p.m. .

The Board of Education also adjourned their meeting and the Board of Finance continued with their regular meeting business.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary