Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
February 18, 2026
Regular Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: T. Gelston; E Dill; T. Sevigny
Also Present: D. Barlow; P. Barlow; J. Bielot; C. Brownell. M. Callahan; P. Govert; J. Hatfield; J. James; S. Jezek; S. Kinsman; J. Leatherbee; S. Martel; B. Matthews; K. McRae; E. Morgen; S. Palmer; M. Pierson; A. Ponanski; A. Shaltiel; A. Starbala; M. Sullivan; R. Swol; O. Weaver; L. White; L. Zemienieski and other members of the public

1. First Selectman Gelston called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of Agenda

Mr. Gelston reviewed the meeting agenda and stated that he would like to add acceptance of a resignation from the Sustainability Committee to Agenda Item 8.A.

Motion made by Mr. Sevigny, seconded by Mr. Dill, to approve the agenda as amended. Unanimous aye.

3. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of January 21, 2025, Special Meeting of January 28, 2026, and Special Meeting of January 29, 2026

Mr. Gelston called the Board's attention to draft minutes in their meeting packets.

Motion made by Mr. Sevigny, seconded by Mr. Dill, to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of January 21, 2026 as written. Unanimous aye.

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Mr. Sevigny, to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of January 28, 2026 as written. Unanimous aye

Motion made by Mr. Sevigny, seconded by Mr. Dill, to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of January 29, 2026 as written. Unanimous aye.

4. Correspondence

The following correspondence read aloud by Mr. Gelston:

- From Deborah Gladdard-Willard expressing her strong support for establishing a library building committee.

- From Linda Wagner expressing her support for establishing a library building committee.

- From Nancy Saunders asking what will become of the existing library buildings if a new library is built.

- From Jocelyn Goldman expressing her support for establishing a library building committee.

5. First Selectmen's Report

Mr. Gelston reported the following:

- The Board of Selectmen will begin their Budget Workshop meetings on February 19th and plan to submit their proposed budget to the BOF on February 28th.
- The new Public Works' Road Foreman will start work in late March.
- Public Works has expended approximately 75% of its snow removal budget for FY25-26.
- He noted the following traffic stop metrics: 10 during the last ten days of November, 29 in December, and 13 in January.
- Three workshops with the EHAA and EHFD have been completed with good results. A fourth workshop is scheduled for Friday, February 20, 2026.
- One company has withdrawn its offer to build a new cell tower in town; the second company is still evaluating the Public Works site on Hood Lane.
- Plans for the Town's America 250 celebration will include a reading of the Declaration of Independence at the Congregational Church on Town Street on July 11th.

A. East Haddam Library System Discussion of New Library: Mr. Gelston opened the floor for library representatives to speak about establishing a new Library Building Committee. The following people spoke in favor of establishing a Building Committee: Library Trustees: Dawn Barlow, John Bielot, Shea Jezek and Laurel White; Library Director Evelyn Morgen, and Maureen Sullivan, resident of East Haddam and former president of the American Library Association (2012), CT State Librarian (2021), and interim director of the New Haven Public Library.

Mr. Gelston thanked the group for their presentation and asked questions about potential sources of funding and whether or not any conceptual designs exist for a new library building. Ms. Zemienieski advised that Silver Petrucelli + Associates had developed several conceptual site plans for various locations around Town. There was a general discussion regarding updating the East Haddam Free Public Library and Rathbun Free Memorial Libraries to make them ADA compliant. He read correspondence from Joan Dill expressing her concern about additional tax burdens on residents and voicing her opinion that a new library is a "want and not a need".

The Selectmen agreed to take the matter of a request to establish a Library Building Committee under consideration at their next regularly scheduled meeting. Library Director Morgen encouraged the Board of Selectmen to put together a Building Committee "sooner rather than later" and they could ask that committee to address all of their questions. Mr. Dill stated that he would be in support creating of a no-budget Library Building Committee.

6. Public Comment

The following public comments were made at the meeting:

- Nicholas Griffin encouraged the Board of Selectmen to put the appropriate level of priority on forming a Library Building Committee.
- Amalia Shaltiel spoke about the benefits of a new library.
- Michael Callahan stated that he had served on the 2022 Library Study Committee and strongly encouraged the Selectmen to appoint a Building Committee.
- In response to a question raised by Shea Jezek, Mr. Gelston confirmed that the topic of forming a Library Building Committee will be on the Board of Selectmen's next regular meeting agenda.
- Jennifer James spoke in support of the Town establishing a Library Building Committee and noted that the Committee could be creative in reaching its goals in a cost effective way.
- Beth Dillon stated that a new library would serve the entire community.
- Brendon Matthews noted that potential liability exists in municipal buildings that are not ADA compliant.
- Peter Govert noted that the large number of residents in attendance spoke to the importance of establishing a Library Building Committee, stated that technologies available to new public buildings can save the Town money in the long-run, and received confirmation from Mr. Gelston that the Selectmen then the citizens will make the decision about whether or not to establish a Library Building Committee.
- James Leatherbee stated that the Library Trustees could count on financial support from the Riverview Cemetery Association for a new library building project.
- Susan Kinsman voiced her support for forming a Library Building Committee.
- Laural White provided clarification for Mr. Matthews comment about the potential liability that exists with a municipal building that is non-ADA compliant by pointing out that establishing a Library Building Committee offers a good argument that the Town is working toward resolving the problem.

7. Unfinished Business

A. Cell Tower Discussion – 440 Town Street: Mr. Gelston advised that one company has withdrawn its offer to construct a cell tower on Town property. He noted that the remaining company is still evaluating the Public Works site on Hood Lane.

B. Open Space Discussion – Sprecher Property Exchange Proposal – Shanaghan Road: There was no update on this agenda item.

C. Open Space Discussion – Dale King Property – South Sheepskin Hollow Road : There was no update on this agenda item.

D. Black Birch Golf Course Feasibility Study Committee Discussion, Charge Approval and Committee Appointments: Mr. Gelston advised that applicants for a position on the Black Birch Golf Course Feasibility Study Committee were interviewed on January 28th and 29th. He stated that the Selectmen need to approve the charge and populate the committee.

Motion made by Mr. Sevigny, seconded by Mr. Dill, to recommend the adoption of the following resolution:

RESOLVED: That the Board of Selectmen appoint a committee of seven (7) persons, effective February 18, 2026, to undertake and complete, within ninety (90) days of the date of their first meeting, a study and evaluation for the potential purchase and restoration of the Black Birch Golf Course for use as a municipal or public golf course for the residents of East Haddam and visitors to East Haddam. Members shall serve with no compensation and nor engage any hired services. The Committee shall meet on a regular basis and their meetings shall be open to the public.

The Black Birch Golf Course Feasibility Study Committee will evaluate the pros and cons of the Town of East Haddam purchasing the property and restoring the Golf Course. The committee will attempt to ascertain a fair market value of the property and consider the Town's potential uses of the property. In so far as is possible, the committee will judge the impact to the Town's finances if the property becomes owned by the Town as well as the potential uses of the property and the effect of those uses on the Town's finances and economic development. As part of this initiative, the Committee will estimate the time and funds required to restore the Golf Course to full public use. In addition to the financial considerations, the Committee will assess the estimated quantity of water available for golf course irrigation throughout the four seasons of the year.

The Black Birch Golf Course Feasibility Study Committee will reach out to the Economic Development Commission, Planning and Zoning Commission, Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission and any other Town organization or department that they feel will assist it in their decision-making process.

The Committee shall submit their findings in a report and make a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen, in writing, within the 90-day period.
Unanimous aye.

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Mr. Sevigny, to appoint Jeffrey Miller, Jef Wolter, Alan Ponanski, Michael Morris, Stephen Longobardi, Donald Lorusso and Daniel Zimmerman to the Black Birch Golf Course Feasibility Study Committee with terms to expire upon completion of said report.
Unanimous aye.

Mr. Gelston stated that correspondence regarding the Black Birch Golf Course Feasibility Study Committee had been received from David Carbo. Mr. Gelston responded to the questions raised in Mr. Carbo's email as follows:

- The only individual appointed to the Feasibility Committee who is either a resident of Banner Estates or has had past or present association with the Banner Estates Condominium Association was Daniel Zimmerman.
- No individuals from the Economic Development Commission's recommendation list were appointed to the Feasibility Committee.

E. America 250 Discussion, Charge Approval and Committee Appointments: Mr. Gelston advised that he is in the process of forming a planning committee for this event; however, the charge and appointments are not yet finalized.

8. New Business

A. Board/Commission/Committee Changes (AGC, SUSCT): The following Board, Commission or Committee changes were considered at the meeting:

Agriculture Commission

Mr. Gelston called the Selectmen's attention to an email dated February 5, 2026 from Aaron Taylor, Chairman of the Agriculture Commission noting recommendations on membership appointments for the Commission.

Motion made by Mr. Sevigny, seconded by Mr. Dill, to appoint Stephanie Cobleigh and Rochelle Davis to fill vacant three-year regular member terms to expire January 1, 2028 on the Agriculture Commission. Unanimous aye.

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Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Mr. Sevigny, to appoint Theresa Govert to fill a vacant two-year alternate member term to expire January 1, 2028 on the Agriculture Commission. Unanimous aye.

Sustainability Team

Mr. Gelston read a letter of resignation received from Amber McDonnell.

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Mr. Sevigny, to accept, with regret, the resignation of Amber McDonnell from the Sustainability Team, effective February 18, 2026. Unanimous aye.

B. Tax Refunds: Mr. Gelston called the Board's attention to four tax refunds.

Motion made by Mr. Sevigny, seconded by Mr. Dill, to award tax refunds in the amounts as presented.

- $ 37.18 to Nissan Infinity LT LLC,
- $ 52.25 to USB Leasing LT,

- $ 66.65 to Brian Wagner, and
- $442.70 to Robert Davidson.

Unanimous aye.

9. Selectmen's Discussion

A. Liaison's Reports: Mr. Sevigny reported that the Redevelopment Agency has scheduled a Public Input meeting for March 26th and the topic of that meeting will be the draft master plan for the Village area.

Mr. Dill reported that he had met with the Facilities Operations Director and the Public Works Acting Director to go over some budget items in preparation for the Town's FY2026-2027 budget season.

B. Other

Mr. Dill asked to clarify what kind of committee the Library Trustees are asking to establish. The consensus was that the Trustees would like the Town to establish a Building Committee to gather information on location, building design and related costs for a new library. The Selectmen agreed that they would consider establishing such a committee; however, no budget could be created for it and a committee charge would be required.

10. Public Comment

The following public comments were heard:

- Mr. Brownell stated that he felt the conversation around establishing a Library Building Committee was a good one and volunteered to participate on the committee if established. He encouraged the Board of Selectmen to hire a Town grant writer and spoke in favor of promoting economic development to reduce the tax burden on individuals.

- Deputy Fire Chief Swol introduced himself to the Selectmen and invited them to observe the Fire Department's drills and meetings to better understand what the Department does.

11. Mackenzie Property Settlement

A. Executive Session - Mackenzie Property Settlement Discussion: Mr. Gelston introduced Owen Weaver to the Selectmen.

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Mr. Sevigny, to enter into executive session at 8:47 p.m. to discuss the proposed Donald J. Mackenzie Jr. v. Town of East Haddam property settlement and to invite Mr. Weaver and Ms. Zemienieski into this session. Unanimous aye.

Selectmen returned to regular session at 9:02 p.m. No motions or decisions were made.

B. Vote on Mackenzie Property Settlement

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Mr. Sevigny, to accept the proposed settlement of the Donald J. Mackenzie Jr. v. Town of East Haddam property matter as presented by the Town's Attorney Owen T. Weaver and authorize the First Selectman to finalize a written settlement agreement. Unanimous aye.

12. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Mr. Sevigny, to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 p.m. .

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary