Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
March 3, 2026
Special Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: T. Gelston; E Dill; T. Sevigny
Also Present: D. Angersola; V. Belles; E. Blaschik; M. Callahan; L. Conroy; D. Dill: R. French; M. Hansen; M. Humble; K. Klinck; R. Lambert; E. Morgen; M. Morris-Wood; M. Olzacki; B. Parker; J. Rhoades; D. Southworth; R. Wonneberger; L. Zemienieski and other members of the public

1. Call to Order: First Selectman Gelston called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Gelston reviewed the meeting agenda.

2. 2026-2027 General Budget Review Workshop

   A. Town Clerk Operating – This budget increased by $4,555.00 (1.91%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Town Clerk Klinck reviewed statistics and accomplishments of the Town Clerk's Office and responded to questions from the Selectmen.

      Mr. Gelston noted that projected FY2026-2027 revenues for this department are $360k versus. its projected expenses of $242.724.00.

   B. Police Department Operating/Capital – The Police Department's Operating budget increased by $24,257.00 (4.07%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Officer Rhoades discussed staffing, state accreditation work, and the department's efforts to stay on top of technology. In response to a question raised by Mr. Sevigny, Ms. Belles advised that the increase in the Capital Assets - Equipment budget line is to maintain the Axon account which was purchased in 2025.

      Officer Rhoades reviewed the following Capital requests:

      - 2026 Ford Vehicle - $96k FY27 (Scheduled Replacement).
      - 2028 Police Vehicle - $96k FY28 (Scheduled Replacement).
      - 2029 Police Cruiser - $96k FY29 (Scheduled Replacement).
      - 2031 Ford Police Cruiser - $96k FY31 (Scheduled Replacement).
      - Bullet Proof Vests - $10k FY29 (Scheduled Replacement).

      Officer Rhoades advised that he would like to establish a 7-year rotation of police vehicles and noted that the listed Capital vehicle requests should put the department on that schedule.

There was a general discussion about the use and sharing of police vehicles. Officer Rhoades noted that the bullet proof vests are on a 5-year replacement schedule and the department generally receives a state grant that offsets the expense.

There was a brief discussion about the department's historical statistics for Traffic Stops, Traffic Accidents, and Calls for Service. Officer Rhoades responded to questions from the Selectmen.

C. Recreation Commission Operating/Capital – The Recreation Commission's Operating budget increased by $8,455.00 (4.6%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Recreation Director Conroy advised that the increase in the Operating budget is mainly due to increases in the Salaries/Wages budget line and the rental of portable toilets for some parks. She explained that the department's Special Revenue Fund offsets much of its salary expense and park use fees offset the rental of the portable toilets. Mr. Gelston stated that he was impressed with the number of programs the Recreation Commission offers.

Ms. Conroy reviewed statistics for the department and the special events it manages. Mr. Gelston noted that the Commission projects approximately $300k in revenue in FY2026-2027 and Ms. Conroy provided additional information about its Special Revenue Fund.

Ms. Conroy reviewed the following Capital requests:

- Volleyball at the Town Beach - $25k FY27 (New Request).
- Community Playground - $100k FY27 (New Request).
- MOC Field Plan - $150k FY27 (New Request).

Recreation Director Conroy responded to questions from the Selectmen.

D. Assessor Operating/Capital – The Assessor's Operating budget increased by $61,225.00 (54.31%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Assessor Lambert advised that the increase is primarily due to an increase in the Salary/Wages line as a result of the Town replacing the part-time (1-day per week) Assessor and two field assessors with a full-time Assessor. She provided a review of the department's statistics and accomplishments and responded to questions from the Selectmen.

Ms. Lambert reviewed the following Capital request:

- Revaluation - $38k FY27 (Scheduled/Required Activity).

E. Collector of Revenue Operating – This budget increased by $2.932.00 (2.65%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Tax Collector Dill provided a brief review of the changes in the department's Operating budget and responded to questions from the Selectmen.

F. Building Department Operating - This budget increased by $11,155.00 (8.88%) over its FY2025-2026 budget primarily in the Salaries/Wages budget line. Ms. Belles advised that, per agreement, the Building Official's salary was increased 60 days after his hire

date and again 6 months after that. She added that negotiations with the clerical union also resulted in an increase of $.50/hr. plus 2.5% overall for the department's secretary. There was a brief discussion regarding the challenges presented by "flippers".

Building Official French reviewed the department's projected revenue of $250k for FY2026-2027 and there was a brief discussion about current and planned building projects in Town. Ms. Belles suggested that the FY2026-2027 revenue might be increased to $300k and Mr. French agreed to revisit his current YTD revenues and advise her if that is reasonable.

G. Elections/Registrars Operating – This budget increased by $33,702.00 (31.59%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Ms. Hansen and Ms. Wonneberger advised that the increase in the Operating budget is due to unfunded state mandates, specifically extended voting days/hours, and technology updates. The Registrars discussed challenges with the state's new voter registration software and its technology in general. They responded to several questions from the Selectmen.

H. Board of Assessment Appeals Operating - This budget decreased by $703.00 (-19.34%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Board of Assessment Appeals Chairman Blaschik attributed the decrease in the budget to a decrease in the number of appeals applications the Board is receiving. In response to a suggestion from Mr. Dill, Mr. Blaschik agreed to keep the Economic Development Commission informed if any Town businesses submit an assessment appeals application. He responded to questions from the Board.

It was noted that ClearGov had incorrectly listed the Zoning Board of Appeals projected FY2026-2027 revenue with the Board of Assessment Appeals Operating budget and Ms. Belles stated she would make the correction.

O. Debt Service – It was noted that the Town's Debt Service for FY2026-2027 was $179,421.00 (-5.77%) less than the previous fiscal year and Ms. Belles confirmed that the Town had paid off some of its debt. She responded to questions from the Board and there was a general discussion regarding the debt that had been paid off and anticipated future bonding.

The attendees broke for lunch at 12:04 p.m. and the meeting reconvened at 1:00 p.m.

I. Youth & Family Services – This budget increased by $5,445.00 (2.17%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Youth & Family Services Director Morris-Wood advised that this is his third week as the full-time director of Youth & Family Services; however, he had previously been with the agency in a part-time interim director position.

Mr. Morris-Wood provided an overview of the services provided by the agency and its service level goals. He advised that the Y&FS's four-year $50k federal STOP Act grant will be ending in September; however, he is applying for a federal DMHAS grant. Mr. Morris-Wood stated that the DMHAS grant is for $125k for five years but noted that it is very competitive.

Mr. Morris-Wood responded to questions from the Selectmen and there was a general discussion about the Y&FS agency's rent.

J. Senior Services Operating/Capital – This budget increased by $12,851.00 (6.7%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Senior Services Director Parker distributed a handout with information about programming, supplies, etc., paid for by the Senior Club. It was noted that the increase in this budget is primarily in the Salaries/Wages budget line and Ms. Belles advised that the salaries of the drivers of the Senior Center buses had, since COVID, historically exceeded its budgeted amount and that has been corrected in the FY2026-2027 budget.

Ms. Belles noted that the -$1k in the Special Program budget line should be $1k and stated she would correct it. Mr. Parker stated that participation at the Senior Center has almost completely recovered since COVID and he responded to questions from the Board.

Mr. Parker reviewed the following Capital requests:

- Senior Center Boiler - $37.500 FY27 (Scheduled Replacement).
- Roof Replacement - $75,150 FY27 (New Request).
- Driveway Sealing - $15k FY27 (Scheduled Replacement).
- Medical Car - $30k FY29 (Update to Existing Capital Plan).

There was a general discussion regarding the planned boiler replacement. Mr. Parker advised that the quote is to replace the existing boiler with two smaller units. Mr. Angersola clarified that there is not enough space in the boiler room to work on or remove the water tank, which is obstructed by the existing boiler, without removing the boiler; however, replacing the existing boiler with two smaller boilers would rectify that problem. It was further noted that the proposal for the two new, smaller, boilers is for $37,500.00 not $75k and Ms. Belles confirmed she would correct that in ClearGov.

K. East Haddam Public Library System Operating/Capital – This budget increased by $13,010.00 (2.53%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Library Director Morgen reviewed the following annual salary statistics for FTE library employees: East Haddam - $19,430.00; Colchester - $60k; East Hampton - $53k; Haddam - $52k; and Hebron - $40k. She noted that the Town's library budget is less than 1% of the total Town budget and that its expenses are offset by $89k (17%) in endowments and donations. Ms. Morgen advised that the libraries are currently looking into purchasing 6-7 new computers. She responded to questions from the Selectmen.

L. Regional Animal Control Operating – This budget increased by $764.00 (1.29%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Animal Control Officer Olzacki reported that the Town currently has regional service agreements with three other municipalities and he expects to sign an agreement with the town of Marlborough soon. Ms. Zemienieski advised that $6k is built into this budget as a savings plan for a new vehicle.

Mr. Olzacki responded to questions from the Board and there was a general discussion about the $2k (66.67%) increase in veterinary services and the need for separate housing facilities for dogs and cats.

M. Board of Finance Operating – This budget decreased by $71,575.00 (-28.03%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Ms. Belles noted that the decrease is primarily due to the fact that she had eliminated the $75k for Ambulance Contingency. She stated that she had included a $90k placeholder in the regular Contingency line.

Ms. Belles advised that the auditor had recommended she increase the fee for next year's audit by 3-4%. She stated that the Town will have to go out to bid for audit services next year and discussed the challenges in doing so since there are so few municipal audit firms left in the state.

N. Fringe Benefits – This budget increased by $89,530.00 (5.91%) over its FY2025-2026 budget. Ms. Belles stated that the increase is primarily due to the high cost of health benefits. She advised that the Town participates in a regional consortium with 6-7 other municipalities, the Eastern CT Health and Medical Consortium. She noted that the Consortium is self-funded and currently negotiating its rates.

Ms. Belles advised that the Firefighters Retirement Pension has, in recent years, been 100+% funded and no Town contribution was required last year. She stated that she is waiting for the actuarial report; however, she is hopeful that a contribution will not be necessary again this year.
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There was a general discussion about the high cost of health insurance.

O. Debt Service – This budget was discussed earlier in the meeting and is reporting on in the above minutes.

P. Interfund Transfers – Ms. Belles advised that the reduction in the proposed FY2026-2027 Interfund Transfers is because she has left the figure for the Transfers to Capital (General Fund) blank because that number will be determined by the Board of Finance.

There was a general discussion about whether the Capital savings for an Ambulance, Fire Apparatus, and Revaluation are adequate and the need to add to them. Ms. Belles provided a brief review of Other Revenue and Endowments; she noted that the state's contribution to East Haddam's Town Aid Road grant had been increased $7,011 this year.

Q. Other Operating/Capital Budget Discussion – Ms. Zemienieski reviewed the BOS's meeting schedule for March 4th and potential budget resolution language. There was a brief discussion regarding the work of the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee.

Officer Rhoades rejoined the meeting and reported that he had just been informed by the vendor that the Police Department's 2026 order for a new Ford pick-up with a police package would not go into production until April, if then. He advised that the department had reached out to another vendor they have done business with in the past who informed them that they have the same vehicle available for shipment and can hold it for East Haddam; however, there would be an increase of $2k in the cost of the vehicle.

Officer Rhoades confirmed that the vendor is a state bidder, that the Police Department has already purchased most of the auxiliary equipment for the vehicle and they would like to cancel the 2026 order and purchase the available Ford pick-up police cruiser. There was a brief discussion concerning where to get the funds for the additional $2k and Ms. Belles and Officer Rhoades agreed that the additional cost of the vehicle could come out of the Police Department's Operating budget. The Selectmen agreed with Officer Rhoades' request, contingent upon his being able to cancel the previous order without penalty and the new vendor include their state bid lnumber on their proposal.

3. Public Comment: There was no public comment raised at the meeting.

4. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Sevigny, seconded by Mr. Dill, to adjourn the meeting at 3:20 p.m. .

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary