# Special Town Meeting
# July 13, 2021

Town Clerk, Debra H. Denette called the Special Town Meeting to order at 8:00 p.m. at the auditorium of the Nathan Hale Ray High School on School Drive. Approximately fifty (50) people were in attendance. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Patricia Stricker motioned to nominate Deb Denette as Moderator, Carleen Quinn seconded the motion. Brad Parker motioned to nominate Scott Jezek as Moderator, Marilyn Gleeson seconded the nomination. Mrs. Denette inquired if there were other nominations, hearing none she called for a motion to close nominations, said motion was made, duly seconded and carried unanimously via voice vote. Mrs. Denette stated that she was happy to acquiesce to Mr. Jezek, accordingly she noted that she had a motion and a second appointing Attorney Jezek as Moderator and called for a vote. The motion carried unanimously via voice vote.

The Moderator read the call of the meeting.

Mrs. Denette motioned to accept the call as read. First Selectman Robert Smith seconded the motion. The Moderator called for a vote accepting the call as read which carried unanimously via voice vote.

Item 1: To consider and discuss (but not to vote on) the Town Budget for the 2021-2022 fiscal year in the amount of $36,369,368 as recommended by the Board of Finance.

All those persons qualified to vote in town meetings of the Town of East Haddam, Connecticut, are hereby further notified that pursuant to Section 7-7 of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Board of Selectmen of the Town of East Haddam have removed the above item on the call of this Special Town Meeting for submission to the voters of the Town of East Haddam who are qualified to vote at Town meetings for "yes" or "no" vote by paper ballots or voting machine ballot labels on the following question:

> Shall the Town of East Haddam budget of $36,369,368, as recommended by the Board of Finance for fiscal year 2021–2022 be approved?

The vote by paper ballots or voting machine ballot labels will be conducted at the Municipal Office Complex, Moodus, Connecticut between the hours of twelve o'clock p.m. and eight o'clock p.m. (in absence of a contrary determination at the Town Meeting) on July 27, 2021.

The Moderator called for a vote on the motion to approve item 1.

Mrs. Denette raised a point of order that the Moderator was looking for a motion to put the item on the floor and emphasized that determination of item 1 would be determined at Referendum. Mrs. Denette then motioned to put item 1 on the floor for discussion, Bill Cross provided the second.

Attorney Jezek requested that those in favor speak first, followed by those in opposition. No one came forward. The Moderator moved on to the next item.

Item #2 To consider and vote on the recommendation of the Board of Selectmen that the polls shall be open at six a.m. to conduct the referendum on July 27, 2021.

**Mr. Parker motioned, Mrs. Stricker provided the second that the legislative body herein assembled authorize a 6 a.m. poll opening to conduct the budget referendum on July 27, 2021.**

The Moderator presented opportunity for discussion. Jim Francese stated that there would never be a good reason to not extend the hours. There being no further discussion,

**The Moderator called for a vote to authorize the 6:00 a.m. poll opening to conduct the budget referendum on July 27, 2021. The motion carried unanimously via voice vote.**

Item #3 To consider and act upon the recommendation of the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance to accept a gift in the amount of $10,000 from Consumer Reports for the Senior Meal Program revenue 29545-44877 and expense account 29544230-58400).

The Moderator requested a motion to put item #3 on the floor.

**Motion made by Mr. Parker, seconded by Mr. Francese to accept a gift in the amount of $10,000 from Consumer Reports for the Senior Meal Program revenue 29545-44877 and expense account 29544230-58400).**

Robert Smith advised that this is part of a $25,000 gift from Consumers Union, the other $15,000 was provided to the East Haddam Food Bank. No comments were received from the floor.

**The Moderator called for a vote to authorize the acceptance of a gift in the amount of $10,000 from Consumer Reports for the Senior Meal Program revenue 29545-44877 and expense account 29544230-58400). The motion carried unanimously via voice vote**

Mr. Jezek noted that the agenda has been concluded.

Mrs. Stuhlman noted that Attorney Jezek proceeded very quickly and that the opportunity for comment on the budget was missed. The Moderator stated that he had no problem revisiting discussion of item #1.

Linda Stuhlman, Palmer Martin Road stated that the first budget failed because of bloated, chunky raises, the secrecy and the lack of transparency. She stated that at public hearing the concerns raised were not addressed with the new budget put forward. She stated that reducing the budget to a 0 mill rate increase doesn't cut it, the handling of it was unacceptable. She stated that she will still advocate for this budget to fail.

Tracy Gionta, Main Street reviewed the lengthy review processes that are gone through to bring a budget forward. She stated that somewhere along the line this became about an election and an administration that some people don't like. She stated that the Board of Finance brought forward a reasonable budget that it believes the town can afford. She took exception to the accusations made. She reviewed the history of a salary study from 2007 that was not acted on and the new one conducted in 2018. She noted that this survey is now on the website and copies are on the back table. She stated that with this document, all employees are covered by a document that says what their position is worth. She also added that the amount represents one tenth of one percent of the budget.

Mr. Francese stated that he was unhappy with the accusatory and vindictive attitude of people who were surprised because they weren't paying attention. He encouraged people to be nicer to their neighbors. He stated that it is your right to be against the raises, but not to sound like a Qanon nut. The Moderator restored order. Mr. Francese concluded that there was no reason to imply that back room dishonest activity is going on.

Mrs. Denette noted that the dual nomination of a Moderator tonight is a prime example of one of those backdoor deals.

Mrs. Denette stated that the revised budget going forward represents a $2,180,267 increase in spending over last year's budget, which becomes next year's base. The zero mill rate is possible because of COVID relief funds and the use of $1,150,000 from the undesignated fund balance (funds the town has already been taxed on). Mrs. Denette cited over taxation to fund reserves which in trade took the power from the people to decide items at town meeting. Mrs. Denette noted that the way the issue of the raises has been handled has been an insult to the voters.

Rebecca Whatley, Hopyard Road questioned where the balance of the survey was. Page 78 would suggest that there are 77 pages prior. With permission from the Moderator, Mr. DiCristofaro responded that this was all of the information that was provided by the vendor.

Mr. DiCristofaro stated that this was a difficult budget cycle. He stated that it is a rough time to be on the Board. They have heard the concerns about the lack of transparency and the lack of trust. He assured that the Board listened. He added that the Board committed to publish the study, it did. He stated that it committed to publish the salaries and did. He encouraged the citizens to be open minded. He reiterated that the Board heard; it just did not agree. Mr. DiCristofaro stated that he feels that the salaries are justified, and all but one member voted in favor of leaving them in the budget.

Diana Zuckerman, East Shore Drive, stated that this is not political nor is it about who likes who. She stated that it is about the lack of getting full answers and transparency. This very simple survey just came out a few hours prior to this meeting. She stated that is not okay and that is not transparency.

Bill Cross stated that he spent a career in compensation, and added that he is a big fan of salary survey's. He stated that what has been presented is the output of a study. He stated that the displeasure is as much about the process as it is about the salary. He inquired if anyone has actually seen the study.

Mr. Smith stated that the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance saw the same document that is available now and that the input data was not provided. Mr. Cross reiterated that this is not as much about the salaries as it is about the process. The process would have been enhanced if there was confidence that someone had reviewed the data.

Harvey Thomas, East Shore Drive utilized the analogy of trusting your doctor when you are diagnosed with x. He stated that a professional was hired to give an opinion, it gave it, and the Board followed it.

Carleen Quinn , Newberry Road stated that the Board of Selectmen did not see the full study during the process, she added that there clearly are pages that are not being shown.

Amalia Shaltiel, Hemlock Valley Road suggested that Randi Frank LLC be contacted and asked to provide the remainder of the document.

Mary Murphy, River Road thanked the Board of Finance for their hard work. She noted that she may not agree with what has been presented, however, she encouraged neighborliness and to work toward disagreeing agreeably.

Linda Stuhlman stated that these raises were the justification for these large raises and there was a different story at every meeting.

Diana Zuckerman stated that she asked Mrs. Varricchio in advance of this meeting for the entire document and was told that it would be provided. Apparently it is not, she stated that it is frustrating.

Mrs. Gionta, noted that what was presented is all that was received from Randi Frank LLC. She suggested that the other pages could be proprietary. Mrs. Gionta concurred that it should be headed as an output of survey. She stated that we can see if we can get it, but that it does not exist in East Haddam. She also added that the Board of Finance did not see this document until today.

Nancy Dunn, Clark Hill Road inquired how much we paid to receive this document. She stated that she would think that the Town would demand that it receive what it paid for.

Hearing no other comments, the Moderator sought a Motion to adjourn to Referendum by acclamation at 8:49 pm

Attest: Debra H. Denette,
Town Clerk
July 15, 2021