

Board of Selectmen  
Municipal Office Complex  
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2  
January 29, 2024  
Special Tri-Board Meeting Minutes

Board of Selectmen Members: Irene Haines, First Selectman; Tanya Bourgoin

Board of Finance Members: Joseph Corbett, Chairman; Todd Gelston, Secretary; Eric Kolasinski; Harvey Thomas; Rebecca Whatley

Board of Education Members: Patricia Stricker, Chairman; James Francese; Terri Garrity; Thea Jansky; Sean Morrissey; Keira Thompson

Others Present: Valerie Belles, Finance Director; Dr. Theresa DeBrito, Superintendent of Schools; Lourdes Evans; Cindy Novak, Amalia Shaltiel, Andrea Webster, Linda Zemienieski, and other members of the public.

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance:

Chairman Corbett called the Board of Finance meeting to order at 7:04 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

First Selectman Haines called the Board of Selectmen meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

Chairman Stricker called the Board of Education meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.

2. Tri-Board Meeting, 2024-2025 Proposed Budget—Boards of Finance, Education and Selectmen

A. Review and Discussion

**Board of Finance**

Chairman Corbett provided opening comments and reviewed the Board of Finance's budget goals, stating the Town plans to bring the 2024-2025 budget to a referendum in May. He reviewed the budget development process and invited citizens to participate in the workshops. He encouraged the public to submit comments/question/concerns early in the process. Mr. Corbett provided information on how the citizens can access information about the budget calendar, meeting agendas, viewing the meetings remotely, and budget detail and updates on ClearGov.

## **Board of Selectmen**

First Selectman Haines provided an overview of the Board of Selectmen's budget process including the use of zero-based budgeting whereby all expenses must be justified.

Ms. Haines reviewed current events affecting the Town's budget such as public safety, economic development, staffing, and capital needs. She provided insight to a number of challenges and cost drivers, noting an almost 20% increase in the premium for employee health insurance coverage. She stated that the Town's areas of focus for 2024-2025 are the revitalization of the East Haddam Village, developing a master plan for Moodus, broadband, housing, and social services.

Ms. Haines also encouraged the public to provide their input before the Boards move too far into the budget development meetings and stated that schedules will be posted listing the dates, to the best of their ability, when particular departmental budgets will be discussed.

She responded to questions from the Board of Finance members. Mr. Thomas requested the Board of Selectmen provide Finance Director Belles with a non-prioritized list of requested capital items which she can send to Mr. Lindsey, the Town's financial advisor, for his consideration before he meets with the Board of Finance in February. There was a general discussion regarding the need for additional housing in Town.

## **Board of Education**

Chairman Stricker introduced new Superintendent Dr. Theresa DeBrito who provided an overview of the Board of Education's budget development considerations. Dr. DeBrito stated that she has been meeting with principals and department heads to put the Board of Education 2024-2025 budget together. She reviewed several significant cost drivers, including staffing, the increased cost of health insurance, student transportation, and unfunded state mandates.

Ms. Stricker stated the Kiera Thompson is Chairman of the Board of Educations's Budget Subcommittee and will be finishing up her meetings with each of the schools shortly. She stated that Ms. Thompson will provide a list of budget requests to the Superintendent who will prioritize them and pass the draft budget onto the Board of Education who will either move it forward to the Town or send it back to the Subcommittee for additional work.

Ms. Thompson noted that numerous Board of Education staffing and capital requests have been postponed over the past several years. Consequently, due to a heightened need to fund those items, combined with increases in the cost of several contractual obligations and the number of unfunded state mandates, she wanted to prepare the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance for a significant increase in the Board of Education's 2024-2025 budget. Ms. Stricker noted that the average budget increase for Connecticut

school systems this year is approximately 5%.

Dr. DeBrito and Board of Education members responded to several questions. There was a general discussion regarding the utilization of textbooks in schools.

B. Guests and Audience Comments:

The following guest/audience comments were discussed at the meeting:

- Cindy Novak – In response to a question raised by Ms. Novak, Superintendent DeBrito confirmed that the Board of Education has had a school climate committee in place for a number of years. Ms. Novak acknowledged the benefits of the Second Step program in the elementary school and supported including it in the Middle School for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades. She expressed her opinion that the program, however, may not be enough to meet the needs of the 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades.
- Amalia Shaltiel – noted that there is quite a bit of federal funding available for the types of projects the Town is considering, and Ms. Haines confirmed that they are looking into state and federal grant programs. Ms. Shaltiel also suggested the following: installing solar panels on school and Town buildings, providing citizens with a list of what is being cut from the Board of Education budget, and regionalizing specialized education classes.
- Lourdes Evans – in response to Ms. Evan’s question about what the Board of Selectmen is doing to bring more businesses to Town, Ms. Haines provided background information on the Redevelopment Agency and its charge, as well as plans to create a masterplan for the revitalization of the Moodus business district.
- Andrea Webster – introduced herself as the new Social Services Coordinator under the umbrella of Youth & Family Services.

Finance Director Belles stated that there were technical difficulties with the live feed of the meeting and, therefore, she had not received any public questions or comments via email. She noted that she believed the meeting was being recorded and said that it would be posted on-line the next day.

Ms. Belles stated that the budget workshop calendar was still being developed. There was a general discussion about the possibility of the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance holding joint meetings to go over the larger budget lines with the applicable department heads to streamline the review process. The Board of Finance and Board of Selectmen agreed, however, not to pursue this option.

3. Adjournment:

There being no additional business to discuss, a motion made by Mr. Kolasinski, seconded by Ms. Whatley, to adjourn the Board of Finance meeting at 8:43 p.m.

There being no additional business to discuss, a motion made by Mr. Francese, seconded by Ms. Thompson, to adjourn the Board of Education meeting at 8:43 p.m.

There being no additional business to discuss, a motion made by Ms. Haines, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to adjourn the Board of Selectmen meeting at 8:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

Irene Haines,  
First Selectman