TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance
Special Tri-Board Meeting Minutes
January 29, 2025
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 and 2
Via Zoom and YouTube Live

Participating:

Board of Finance Members:

Todd Gelston, Chairman
William Barney
Joseph Corbett
Maureen Goff
Eric Kolasinski
Harvey Thomas

Absent: Eric Kolasinski

Others Participating:

Board of Selectmen Members:

Irene Haines – First Selectwoman
Tanya Bourgoin
Erik Dill

Board of Education Members:

Dr. Teresa DeBrito – Superintendent of Schools
Patricia Stricker, Chairman
Jacqueline Endorf
James Francese
Terri Garrity
Thea A. Jansky
Keira Thompson

Finance Director Valerie Belles, Executive Manager Linda Zemienski, and other members of the public

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mr. Gelston called the Board of Finance meeting to order at 7:02 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

Ms. Haines called the Board of Selectmen meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

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

TRI-BOARD MEETING, 2025-2026 PROPOSED BUDGET – BOARDS OF FINANCE, EDUCATION AND SELECTMEN

a. Review and Discussion

Board of Finance

Mr. Gelston provided opening comments and noted that the Tri-Board meeting is the official kick-off of the Town's budget season. He stated that the budget process allows the public to hear the Town's goals and intentions for the upcoming fiscal year.

Mr. Gelston stated that it is the Board of Finance's intention to work together with the Boards of Selectmen and Education to achieve needed services at the least cost. He defined their goal as one that would craft a budget that balances the Town's needs with its anticipated available revenues and earns the taxpayers' approval by June 30th.

Mr. Gelston explained that the budget process allows the three Boards an opportunity to hear the Town's citizens' questions and comments before the budget referendum. He described the BOF's role in this process and noted that, this year, there are significant challenges to achieving the Town's budgetary goal due to inflation and the number of Town needs. He invited the public to attend budget workshops and encouraged their participation in the process.

Board of Selectmen

First Selectwoman 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. She stated that, in response to public feedback, the Town is working hard to provide more detail about expenses in ClearGov. She noted that salaries will be listed on the site, by position, and advised that the Town's budget calendar will be continuously updated on the Town's website so that the public can know when any department head will be discussing their budget with the Board of Selectmen and/or the Board of Finance.

Ms. Haines noted the general overall increase in the cost of supplies, utilities, and manpower and reviewed the Town's budget calendar. She advised that all of the budget workshops will be open to and welcoming of input, suggestions, and comments from employees, Board and Commission members, and the public.

First Selectman Haines provided an overview of a number of public safety initiatives, including designing and constructing a new building for Fire Company No. 2, a road improvement plan based on the recently completed road study, and the consideration of using of automated traffic devises to control speeding. She advised that the Town has not had much response to its postings for full and part-time police officer positions or full-time firefighter/EMTs and part-time EMTs due to a lack of competitive salaries and/or benefits and she would like to rectify that problem.

Ms. Haines discussed the need to continue economic development projects in order to attract more revenue to the Town. She cited a number of projects the Redevelopment Agency currently has underway in the Village area, noted several new businesses in the area, and stated that a master plan for Moodus center should be completed this spring. She noted that the Broadband project, as well as a potential affordable housing project in Moodus, will also help foster economic development.

Ms. Haines reported that, in addition to the aforementioned public safety positions, the Town plans to hire a part-time Director of Emergency Services, and there are staffing needs in Library Services, Grounds & Maintenance, and Public Works.

Ms. Haines briefly reviewed the work of the Long Range Capital Improvements Committee. She responded to questions and there was a brief discussion about researching the CT Municipal Employee Retirement System as a potential benefit for Town employees.

Board of Education

Superintendent Dr. Teresa DeBrito stated that the Board of Education's vision for the East Haddam school system is one of a district of distinction and she provided an overview of how that can be accomplished.

Dr. DeBrito provided highlights on the BOE's initiatives, including reading programs, social and emotional learning practices, and professional development. She discussed the Leader in Me initiative for 9th graders, a life-skills program based on the 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, the high school Rise Network, building thinking classrooms, and promoting STEM curriculum through Project Lead the Way and the high school robotics program.

Dr. DeBrito reviewed a list of field experiences which students of all levels are provided and noted that career and motivational speakers are also invited in to address students. She advised that the state had awarded the Elementary School with the honorarium of a School of Distinction. Superintendent DeBrito stated that additional priorities for 2026 are achieving NEASC accreditation and compliance, professional learning focused on Tier 1, and staffing needs.

Dr. DeBrito noted the increased cost of several expenses this year, including employee benefits and purchased services and she reviewed a list of the BOE's contractual obligations. She also noted that the state has cut its funding for the schools' food service breakfast and lunch programs resulting in a -40% impact on that budget item.

b. Guests and Audience Discussion

There were no guest or audience comments discussed at the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Ms. Goff to adjourn the meeting at 7:47 p.m. Mr. Corbett seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

The Boards of Selectmen and Education also adjourned their meetings.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
William Barney
Secretary