

**TOWN OF EAST HADDAM**  
**Board of Finance**  
Special Meeting Minutes  
March 15, 2025  
Municipal Office Building – Room 1 & 2  
Via Zoom and YouTube Live

Participating:

Board of Finance Members:

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

Others:

Valerie Belles, Finance Director  
Don Angersola, Facilities Director  
Dawn Barlow, Library Trustee  
Irene Haines, First Selectwoman  
Evelyn Morgan, Library Director  
Linda Zemienieski, Executive Manager  
Ray Swol, Deputy Fire Chief  
John Cotter, Fire Department  
And other members of the public

**CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Mr. Gelston called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

a. Special Meeting February 28, 2024

**Motion made by Mr. Thomas to postpone the review and approval of the Minutes of the Board of Finance’s Special Meeting of February 28, 2024. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.**

**2025-2026 BUDGET**

Ms. Belles responded to several questions about the prioritizing of FY2025-2026 Capital requests.

- a. Selectmen/Capital - A 3.2% (\$6,130.00) increase was reflected in the Selectmen's Operating budget. First Selectwoman Haines reviewed the Operating budget and responded to questions from the Board regarding increases in the Salaries & Wages line item.

There was a general discussion regarding the revenue generated from the Cell Tower and Ms. Belles stated she would research whether or not it would be reasonable to increase this Revenue line item. Ms. Haines and Ms. Belles provided clarification about the Goodspeed Opera House PILOT revenue. Ms. Belles provided additional details about the Revenues by Source.

Capital – Ms. Haines provided an overview of the following Selectmen's capital requests:

- \$150k for the demolition of the Town Office Annex building.
- \$26,907.00 to reseal the Municipal Office Complex parking lot.
- \$15k for phone system upgrades for off-site municipal buildings.
- \$15k for upgrades and future replacements of the MOC video conferencing systems.

Ms. Haines responded to several questions from the Board. Ms. Zemienieski provided additional details about the phone and video system upgrades. Mr. Angersola provided information about the request for funding to demo the Annex building at the old Town Office site.

- b. Board of Finance - A 82.3% (\$126,598.00) increase was reflected in the Board of Finance's Operating budget. Finance Director Belles reviewed this budget and advised that the drivers of the increase are the cost of the Town's audit and GASB compliance and allowing for \$100k in Contingency for the Ambulance service. She noted that the Board will have an opportunity to discuss the Contingency allowance for the Ambulance service when the East Haddam Ambulance Association attends one of the BOF's budget workshops to discuss their FY2025-2026 budget.
- c. Finance Office – A 2.6% (\$2,044.00) increase was reflected in the Finance Office's Operating budget. Ms. Belles explained that the increase was due to the negotiated 2.5% increase in Town employee's Salaries & Wages and a small increase in the Cell Phone expense.
- d. Assessor/Capital – A 1.3% (\$1,473.00) increase was reflected in the Assessor's Operating budget. The Board discussed the impact on the Town's Grand List from the state's change in how vehicles are valued for property tax purposes.

Capital – Ms. Haines provided an overview of the Assessor's capital request:

- \$38k for the Town's' annual contribution to a fund for the 5-year revaluation project.
- e. Board of Assessment Appeals – The Board of Assessment Appeals' FY2025-2026 Operating budget was flat over the previous fiscal year. There was no discussion of this budget.
- f. Collector of Revenue – A 3.4% (\$3,594.00) increase was reflected in the Collector of Revenue's Operating budget. Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted that the increase was due to the negotiated 2.5% increase in Town employee's Salaries & Wages and an increase to the cost of printing and mailing the property tax bills.

- g. Legal Services – A 6.3% (\$5,000.00) increase was reflected in the Legal Services Operating budget. Ms. Haines advised that the increase was requested by the Land Use Administrator to support anticipated work on blighted properties.
- h. Town Clerk – A 2.7% (\$6,260.00) increase was reflected in the Town Clerk’s Operating budget. Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted that, in addition to the negotiated 2.5% increase in Salaries & Wages and some other minor increases, the cost of Recordings has increased. In response to a question from Ms. Goff, Ms. Haines noted that the revenue generated from recordings does not fully offset the expense because the Town must pass through a significant portion of the revenues collected to the state.
- i. Zoning Board of Appeals – A 1.7% (\$50.00) increase was reflected in the Zoning Board of Appeals’ Operating budget. Ms. Haines noted that the increase to the budget is due to an anticipated increase in the Postage expense.
- j. Town Office Building – A 9.3% (\$500.00) increase was reflected in the Town Office Building Operating budget as a result of an anticipated increase in the electricity expense.
- k. Elections/Registrars of Voters – A 16.3% (\$14,988.00) increase was reflected in the Registrars of Voters Operating budget. Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and stated that the increase is due to the state’s mandated early voting requirements impact on Salaries & Wages and the Voting Machine Setup expense. She confirmed that there is no Capital request for new voting machines because the state will provide them.
- l. Insurance/Risk Management – A 1.6% (\$4,000.00) increase was reflected in the Insurance (Risk Management) Operating budget. Ms. Haines advised that the increase was a result of an increase in the premium for the Town’s Liability Insurance coverages.
- m. Regional Probate Court – A -0.3% (-\$56.00) decrease was reflected in the Regional Probate Court budget. Ms. Haines advised that the Town’s contribution to this budget is based on a per-capita rate. She noted that there was a one-time fee that the Town paid last fiscal year which was not applied this year, resulting in a small reduction in the budget.
- n. Land Use/Capital – A 13.3% (\$28,591.00) increase was reflected in the Land Use department’s Operating budget. Ms. Haines explained that the increase is primarily due to a proposed \$24,500.00 increase in the Transfer to WPCA. Ms. Belles provided additional details and there was a brief discussion about potential improvements to the Town’s Water Pollution Control facilities. In response to a request from Mr. Gelston, Ms. Belles agreed to provide additional clarification at a future budget workshop.

Capital – Ms. Haines provided an overview of the following Land Use capital request:

- \$30k to fund the second of three \$30k installments for the Moodus Master Plan project.

- o. Historic District Commission – The Historic District Commission’s FY2025-2026 Operating budget was flat over the previous fiscal year. There was no discussion of this budget.

- p. Conservation Commission – An 11% (\$1,600.00) increase was reflected in the Conservation Commission’s Operating budget. Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted that the increase is due to increases in the Salaries & Wages and Supplies budget lines.
- q. Town Meeting Hall - The Town Meeting Hall’s FY2025-2026 Operating budget was flat over the previous fiscal year. There was no discussion of this budget.
- r. Shared Services – Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted that the BOE had requested a \$450k increase in the Transfer to the BOE Technology fund; however, the budget the Board was reviewing did not reflect this increase. Ms. Belles stated she would provide the Board with an updated Shared Services FY2025-2026 Operating budget. She provided an overview of what is included in the transfers to Town Technology, Town Maintenance, BOE Technology, and BOE Maintenance. In response to a request from Mr. Gelston, Ms. Belles agreed to provide additional information about the BOE’s Technology fund.
- s. River House/Annex – A 10% (\$200.00) increase was reflected in the River House/Annex Operating budget due to an anticipated increase in the Electricity expense. In response to a question raised by Mr. Barney, Mr. Angersola confirmed that, other than the River House’s porch, the structures of the River House and Old Town Office building are in good shape. Mr. Gelston noted that the property is one of the first impressions the Town makes on visitors coming across the Swingbridge and noted that the buildings’ exteriors are in need of paint.
- t. Municipal Office Complex/Central Services – An 8.2% (\$30,806.00) increase was reflected in the MOC/Central Services Operating budget. Ms. Haines and Ms. Zemienieski reviewed this budget. There was a general discussion about the projected \$20k increase in the Electricity expense. Ms. Zemienieski responded to questions from the Board and noted that the building is used 7-days per week and in the evenings throughout the week. Ms. Haines and Mr. Angersola provided information about their attempts to secure a solar lease for the building.
- Capital – Ms. Zemienieski reviewed the following FY2025-2026 Capital requests:
- \$50k for a MOC Led Sign – this project was previously part of the MOC Building Committee’s original plan; however, did not get implemented. There was a general discussion regarding the benefits of communicating meeting and Town event notices on a LED sign in front of the Municipal Office Complex.
  - \$46k for updating MOC Network switches.
- u. Millington School House – An 850.8% (\$10,380.00) increase was reflected in the Millington School House Operating budget. Mr. Angersola reviewed this budget and noted that, in addition to a \$30.00 increase in the Electricity line item, that rest of the increase was for Building Maintenance. He noted that exterior painting, replacement of a number of clapboards, and repairs to the flag pole are needed. Ms. Zemienieski stated that the building was last painted in 2014.
- v. Open Space Committee – A 77.8% (\$3,500.00) increase was reflected in the Open Space Committee’s Operating budget. Ms. Haines reviewed this budget. She advised that the increase is primarily due to allowing an additional \$2,250.00 for surveys, appraisals and signage.

- w. Grange Hall – The Grange Hall’s FY2025-2026 Operating budget was \$100.00 lower than the previous fiscal year. There was no discussion of this budget.
- x. Agriculture Commission – The Agriculture Commission’s proposed FY2025-2026 Operating budget was flat over the previous fiscal year. There was no discussion of this budget.
- y. Economic Development Commission – A 1.8% (\$487.00) increase was reflected in the Economic Development Commission’s Operating budget. The increase was a result of the negotiated 2.5% increase in Town employee’s salaries.

Capital – Ms. Haines provided information on the following Capital request:

- \$12k for the third of seven annual contributions to the EDC’s Bike Path project. Ms. Haines stated that the project is moving forward and the towns of Chester and Haddam are currently participating.
- z. Redevelopment Agency – discussion of this agenda item was postponed until later in the meeting.
  - aa. Police Officers/Capital – An 11.1% (\$59,633.00) increase was reflected in the Police Officers’ Operating budget. Ms. Haines noted that the increase is a consequence of a proposed 12.3% increase in the Salaries & Wages budget line. She noted the Town will be going into negotiation with the Police on their contract and also discussed challenges in attracting qualified candidates for full-time positions.

Mr. Barney observed that the department’s 2024 Performance Measure had gone down since the previous fiscal year and Ms. Haines reviewed a number of additional safety issues the Police are dealing with. There was a general discussion regarding staffing levels and Ms. Haines confirmed that the Resident State Trooper is assigned to the Town by Troop K.

In response to a comment from Mr. Kolasinski, Ms. Haines confirmed that the state legislature is considering requiring municipalities to provide a pension plan for police and firefighters but she does not have much information on it yet.

Capital – Ms. Haines reviewed the following FY2025-2026 Capital requests:

- \$96k for a Police Vehicle.
- \$96k for a second Police Vehicle.
- \$10k for bullet proof vests.

Ms. Haines noted that the Police would like to have one of the new vehicles be a truck which would add approximately \$5k to the expense. In response to an inquiry from Mr. Kolasinski, Ms. Haines confirmed that the Police have typically had six vehicles in their fleet. There was a general discussion regarding staffing, overlap of shifts, and the appropriate number of vehicles needed for the Police to do their job safely and effectively.

- bb. Resident Trooper – A 7.4% (\$10,000.00) increase was reflected in the Resident State Trooper’s Operating budget. Ms. Haines noted that the Town is billed by the state for its Resident State Trooper and the Town is projecting a \$10k increase in the amount.
- cc. Fire Department – Discussion of this agenda item was postponed.
- dd. Emergency Management/Capital – A 1.8% (\$3,431.00) increase was reflected in the Emergency Management Service’s Operating budget. Ms. Haines reported that the increase is due to a combination of a 2.5% negotiated increase in Town employees’ Salaries & Wages and a \$3,312.00 increase in contractual 9-1-1 services provided by Valley Shore. Ms. Haines confirmed that the Town had considered other contractors; however, they feel Valley Shore provides the most services for a fair fee.
- Capital – Ms. Haines reviewed the following FY2025-2026 Capital requests:
- \$10k for the Town’s annual contribution toward the cost to Replace Out-of-Cycle Radios, Mobiles, and Portables.
  - \$10k for the Town’s annual contribution for the Replacement of Radio Equipment at the Tower Sites.
- ee. Paramedic Services – A 0.2% (\$22.00) increase was reflected in the Paramedic Services’ Operating budget. Ms. Haines advised that this a per-capita based fee that Middlesex Hospital charges to provide paramedic services to the Town.
- z. Redevelopment Agency/Capital – A 154.7% (\$47,500.00) increase was reflected in the Redevelopment Agency’s Operating budget. Ms. Belles advised that the Agency had included an additional \$47.5k in their Purchased Professional Services budget line for grant writing services; however, she expects that a Capital request item will be created for grant writing services for the Town, and this amount will be moved out of the Redevelopment Agency’s Operating budget.
- ff. Building Department – A -4.1% (-\$5,421.00) decrease was reflected in the Building Department’s Operating budget. Ms. Belles noted that the department projects collecting \$200k in Revenue in FY2025-2026 and she does not recommend increasing that amount this year.

In response to a question raised by Mr. Gelston, Ms. Haines confirmed that the Town had previously reviewed and adjusted some of its Building Department fees and she feels they are reasonable and in line with the surrounding towns. She noted that she has been getting positive feedback on the Building Department staff.

- gg. Regional Animal Control – A 3.5% (\$2,000.00) increase was reflected in the proposed FY2025-2026 transfer to the Regional Animal Control fund. Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted the Town cost-shares the Animal Control services with East Hampton and Columbia. She noted there has been an increased workload on the Animal Control Officer since CT DEEP often does not respond to calls regarding wildlife. Mr. Gelston suggested submitting a bill to the State for the DEEP responsibilities to which the Town’s Animal Control Officer responds.

- hh. Fire Marshal – A 8.4% (\$2,278.00) increase was reflected in the Fire Marshal’s Operating budget. Mr. Angersola reviewed this budget. He stated that the primary drivers of the proposed increase are \$800.00 in the Repairs & Maintenance budget line to purchase new tires for the department’s vehicle and a \$1,000.00 in the Gasoline/Diesel budget line. Mr. Angersola advised that he includes the fuel expense for the Facilities and BOE work in this budget.
- ii. Youth & Family Services – A 2.4% (\$5,805.00) increase was proposed for the Town’s contribution to the Y&FS FY2025-2026 budget. There was a brief discussion regarding the requested increase and Ms. Haines and Ms. Belles noted that utilities and insurance are some of the main drivers of the increase in the Y&FS budget.
- jj. Youth & Family Early Childhood Council – Ms. Haines advised that the Town provides some cost-sharing with the Board of Education for this budget item. No change was requested in the FY2025-2026 budget.
- kk. Chatham Health District – A 2.7% (\$3,456.00) increase was reflected in the Chatham Health District’s Operating budget. Ms. Haines advised that this expense is based on the CHD’s approved budget and a per-capita rate for the Town.
- ll. Senior Services/Capital – A 2.7% (\$4,987.00) increase was reflected in the Senior Services’ Operating budget. Ms. Haines reviewed this budget and noted that the increase is primarily due to the 2.5% negotiated increase in employees’ Salaries & Wages, a \$200.00 increase in the Cell Phone expense, and a \$2,100.00 in Supplies (Electricity and Bottled Gas).
- Capital – Ms. Haines and Mr. Angersola reviewed the following Capital request:
- \$37.5k for a new boiler. Mr. Angersola advised that the existing boiler is at the end of its useful life; however, he noted that there have been no problems with boiler and this Capital request could be postponed.
- mm. Human Services – A 21.6% (\$1,000.00) increase was reflected in the Human Services Operating budget. Ms. Haines explained that agencies listed in this budget help support East Haddam citizens in need of medical, mental health, dental, meals, energy assistance and homelessness services. She stated that the value of those services far exceeds the Town’s contributions to the agencies. Ms. Haines advised that the Community Renewal Team transitioned its senior meals services to Senior Resources; consequently, she had increased the Senior Resources budget line by \$650.00. She stated that she had proposed an increase of \$50.00 to most of the other agencies.
- nn. Cemeteries – A 338.4% (\$24,700.00) increase was reflected in the Cemeteries’ Operating budget. Ms. Haines provided some background on the Cemeteries Committee. She stated that she feels the Facilities Grounds Maintenance department should be responsible for maintaining the Town’s cemeteries, and the Committee should focus on finding a suitable site for a new Town cemetery. Ms. Zemienieski provided additional information.

Ms. Haines advised that two sites, 2.7 acres and 4.8 acres, behind the Mt. Parnassus Cemetery might be available and the Town has had them appraised at \$1.81k. She noted that this item should be included in Capital requests.

There was a general discussion about the need for a new cemetery, the feasibility of utilizing some Open Space property for a new Town cemetery, and what the Town's statutory responsibility is to provide burial grounds. Mr. Gelston requested that the Cemetery Committee be charged with researching the actual need for a new cemetery.

Capital – Ms. Haines reviewed the following Capital request:

- \$13k to establish a Reserve account for surveying and appraisal work.

cc. Fire Department/Capital – A 24.2% (\$142,986.00) increase was reflected in the Fire Department's Operating budget. Ms. Haines reviewed a proposed new part-time Public Safety Director position. In response to a request from Mr. Thomas, Ms. Haines agreed to provide the Board with a draft job description for the position. Ms. Belles responded to questions from the Board regarding several Salaries & Wages budget changes.

There was a general discussion about the proposed 39.5% increase in Salaries & Wages and Ms. Haines and Ray Swol discussed the difficulty in retaining qualified full-time firefighters since the Department's compensation is not competitive with other CT municipalities.

Capital – The following Capital requests were reviewed:

- \$50k for the Town's annual contribution to the Air Pack Replacement fund.
- \$15k for the Town's annual contribution to the Fire Hose replacement fund.
- \$1.5M to replace Engine 2-15 and Rescue vehicle 1-15 with a Squad.
- \$1.5M to replace Engine 6-15 and Rescue vehicle 4-15 with a Squad.
- \$18k for Ropes/Repel Gear.
- \$18k for Wet Suits & Cold Water Accessories.

Ms. Belles noted that the BOF is considering bonding for the two new Squads. In response to questions from Mr. Thomas, Ray Swol confirmed that the apparatus the Squads will be replacing will be sold and that there is a 3-4 year lead time on the Squads. Mr. Kolasinski suggested the Fire Department look into purchasing the vehicles from HGACBuy.

The Board took a brief lunch recess at 12:54 p.m. and reconvened at 1:00 p.m.

oo. East Haddam Public Library/Capital – An 11.1% (\$51,585.00) increase was reflected in the Public Library's Operating budget. Library Director Morgan advised that the most significant change to this budget was in staffing (Salaries & Wages). She stated that she has requested the two part-time high school interns be reinstated at minimum wage and the East Haddam Free Library's Branch Manager's hours be increased 5 hours to make his scheduled hours equitable with the Rathbun's Branch Manger's hours. She noted that she had also included several merit increases for library staff.

In response to questions from the Board, Director Morgan stated that the Town's two libraries are open, jointly, 90 hours per week and together they average 25,000 visits annually. Ms.

Morgan noted that the Rathbun Library had added \$7k back in on the Heat line item because they have found that the mini-splits are not entirely sufficient during extremely cold weather.

pp. Recreation Commission/Capital – A 5.2% (\$9,170.00) increase is reflected in the Recreation Commission’s Operating budget. Ms. Haines stated that Recreation Director Conroy had increases in the Salaries & Wages budget line for: the summer intern, to keep pace with minimum wage; an increase for the Assistant Director, who is instrumental in helping the department achieve a 22% increase in revenues, a 20% increase in program registrations, and a 18% increase in programs and activities; and for lifeguards which is a highly competitive hiring market. The only other increase in the Operating budget is a \$9.00 increase in the Miscellaneous category.

Capital – Ms. Haines reviewed the following Capital requests:

- \$25k for an Outdoor Volleyball Court at Town Beach.
- \$100k for a Community Playground on the Municipal Office Complex property.
- \$150k for a Recreation Field Plan at the Municipal Office Complex.

There was a general discussion about the Recreation Department’s statistics and its Special Revenue fund for its programs.

qq. Town Greens, Grounds and Fields/Capital – A 36.8% (\$55,048.00) increase was reflected in the Town Greens, Grounds and Fields Operating budget. Mr. Angersola noted that the department maintains 38 properties including plowing and sanding all of the Town building sidewalks and parking lots. He stated that it is difficult to keep on top of all the work with just two employees and he is requesting an additional Grounds Maintainer be added to the staff. Other than Salaries & Wages, the only other two budget items that had increases were Electricity (\$200.00) and Gasoline/Diesel (\$1,500.00).

Capital – Mr. Angersola reviewed the following Capital requests:

- \$88,563.00 for a Grounds Maintenance Service Truck.
- \$21,500.00 contribution for a Grounds Maintenance Ventrac Tractor in 2027.

There was a general discussion about the possibility of leasing the truck.

rr. Lakes Association – A 48.1% (\$16,504.00) increase was reflected in the Lakes Association’s Operating budget. Ms. Haines noted that the increase is primarily for Lake Restoration at Bashan Lake and Moodus Reservoir. She noted that hydrilla has been identified in Bashan Lake and, if left untreated, it can kill the lake. Ms. Zemienieski noted that the Lakes Associations contribute matching, or better, funds to the Operating budget.

Capital – the following Capital request was reviewed:

- \$15k for the second of two payments for repairs to the Lake Hayward Dam Repair.

ss. Other Budget Items as Time Permits – Ms. Belles reported that FY2025-2026 expenses, exclusive of any Capital requests or contributions from Fund Balance, is currently \$43.8M. She noted that if the Operating expenses were kept flat with FY2024-2025, the tax levy would

increase \$500k because of the decrease in the Grand List as a result of the state's new valuation process for vehicles.

There was a general discussion about the state's rationale for changing how vehicles are valued for tax purposes. Ms. Belles discussed Fund Balance contributions and advised that none had to be taken for the past several years because there has been a surplus in the budget.

In response to an inquiry from Mr. Corbett, there was a discussion about the possibility of the Town adopting a higher percentage of the MSRP to determine a vehicle taxable value. Ms. Haines noted that many municipalities are choosing not to adopt that alternative.

### **GUESTS AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS**

There was no guest or audience comments at the meeting.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion made by Mr. Kolasinski to adjourn the meeting at 2:54 p.m. Mr. Barney seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.**

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

William Barney

Secretary