Board of Selectmen
Municipal Office Complex
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2
May 21, 2025
Regular Meeting Minutes

Selectmen Present: I. Haines; T. Bourgoin; E. Dill

Also Present: A. Bordick; N. Bordick; K. Boulware; R. Boulware; E. Chamberland; L. D'Aquila; N. D'Aquila; S. Deguzis; W. Denya; D. Dill; D. DiStefano; R. Malbuisson; R. Masci; S. Pare; M. Roberts; S. Roberts; K. Tosi; L. Zemienieski and other members of the public

1. First Selectman Haines called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and the attendees said the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of Agenda

   Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to approve the agenda as written. Unanimous aye.

3. Approval of Minutes – Regular Meeting of May 7, 2025, Special Meeting of May 12, 2025

   Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to unapproved minutes in their meeting packets.

   Motion made by Ms. Bourgoin, seconded by Mr. Dill, to approve the minutes of the Regular Meeting of May 7, 2025 as written. Unanimous aye.

   Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of May 12, 2025 as written. Unanimous aye.

4. Correspondence: There was no correspondence discussed at this time in the meeting.

5. First Selectmen's Report

   A. Board of Assessment Appeals – Spring 2025 Report: Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to a report from the Board of Assessment Appeals, dated April 30, 2025. She noted that Chairperson Blaschik reported that seven property appeals had been submitted and the Board had reduced the assessment on three of the properties for a total reduction in the Grand List of $149,380.00. Expenses were reported as $704.00 for 44 work hours.

   B. East Haddam Ambulance Association Presentation: Mr. Tosi provided a presentation to the Board of Selectmen and stated that the EHAA's funding request for FY2025 is $70,897.00. He explained how the Ambulance Association calculated that figure and noted that they have taken a very conservative approach for projecting the anticipated shortfall.

There was a brief discussion about stipends paid by the EHAA and Mr. Tosi provided clarification about adjustments to Town funds for stipends and Workers' Compensation insurance.

In response to a question from Ms. Bourgoin, Mr. Tosi confirmed that the stipends paid by the EHAA go directly to the East Haddam Fire Department. Mr. Tosi stated that the projected FY2025 shortfall includes a 4.5% salary increase for new employee retention. Ms. Haines noted that the standard salary increase for Town employees for FY2025-2026 is 2.5% and Mr. Tosi stated that EHAA's salary increases had been based on the overall Wages & Salaries increase in the Fire Department's FY2025-2026 budget.

Mr. Tosi reviewed additional EHAA financial details and noted several potential risks to their future revenue streams. In response to questions from Ms. Bourgoin and Mr. Dill, he elaborated on the risk related to the proposal to share the Town's emergency medical services calls with the Fire Department and stated that the impact to the EHAA would be that their revenues would decrease without a comparable decrease to their expenses. Ms. D'Aquila provided additional background on EHAA's agreement with the Town to utilize Firefighter/EMTs to cover the day shift when the Ambulance Association had less volunteer coverage.

Mr. Dill inquired about whether or not any action was taken on his recommendation to create a line item in the Town's budget for the EHAA similar to ones they currently have for other non-profit organizations. Ms. Zemienieski stated that the BOF did not create a specific line item for the EHAA in the proposed FY2025-2026 budget. She noted that funds to cover the Association's shortfall for FY2025 would come from the Board of Finance Contingency Fund. Mr. Dill expressed his discomfort with funding the Ambulance Association's shortfall with Contingency funds and Mr. Tosi stated they would be in favor of having a Town budget line item dedicated to the EHAA. Ms. Haines noted that it would be the Board of Finance's responsibility to set-up a distinct line item for the Ambulance Association.

There was a general discussion about the use of the Contingency Fund to cover the EHAA's shortfalls. Ms. Haines thanked Mr. Tosi for his presentation.

Motion made by Ms. Bourgoin, seconded by Mr. Dill, to support and recommend the Board of Finance approve the East Haddam Ambulance Association's request for $70,897.00 in funding for their shortfall for FY 2025. In favor: Ms. Bourgoin, Mr. Dill. Opposed Ms. Haines. Motion carried.

6. Public Comment

The following public comments were made the meeting:

- Stephanie Pare thanked the Board for approving the EHAA's request to cover their FY2025 shortfall. She stated that she has been a volunteer EMT/EMR for the past 8 years and on the EHAA Board of Directors since 2011. Ms. Pare advised that the Town's First Selectman is an ad hoc member of the EHAA BOD's and that at the first Association

Board meeting Ms. Haines attended following her successful election, she "threatened" that she was going to get a new ambulance company. It was Ms. Pare's opinion that Ms. Haines made that statement without knowledge of the EHAA's performance, quality of care, relationship with the community, or its operations. She stated that the Ambulance Association has been operating under that threat for the past 3.5 years and the related legal fees are being paid by the taxpayers. In closing, she asked the question: "*Is this how we want our tax dollars spent?"* (Full text of the comments is attached to these minutes.)

- Margie Roberts stated she is a member of EHAA's Board of Directors and a taxpayer. She discussed the difficulties the EHAA had getting on the BOS's agenda and advised that the reason they were given for not being added to the May 7th agenda was "*due to pending legal matters and the need to complete a new agreement with the Town*". Ms. Roberts noted that neither of the issues were related, or relevant, to the financial status update and request for funding the Association wanted to present to the BOS.

  Ms. Roberts clarified that EHAA's suit against the Town was an Administrative Appeal and had no monetary component. She noted that the suit was dismissed on May 19th and, therefore, it was illogical that, as stated by the Town that "on the advice of counsel" Town leadership prohibited EHAA from meeting with the Town government.

  Ms. Roberts discussed the Town's "failure" to provide ambulance resources and capability within the statutorily allotted timeframe and consequently, she feels, the Town is not capable of providing emergency medical service and the residents will be put at risk. She also stated that EHAA has been engaged in creating a new agreement with the Town since last fall but the fact that there is not a signed agreement for FY2026 should not have a bearing on their request for funding for the FY2025 shortfall.

  Ms. Roberts reiterated her concern that the EHAA had been prohibited from presenting their funding request for FY2025 and also that all of the members of the BOS had not been informed of such activities. She encouraged everyone to stay focused on what is best for the Town residents. (Full text of the comments is attached to these minutes.)

- Denise DiStefano expressed that she was surprised when she heard of First Selectmen Haines' intention to replace the EHAA with the Fire Department as the Town's providers of emergency medical services. She added that she was also offended when Ms. Haines denigrated the Ambulance Association while speaking positively about the EHFD and felt she has spread false or misleading information about the EHAA. She stated that she had agreed to serve on the Board of EHAA because she believes in its mission of providing compassionate, professional emergency medical care to the community.

  Ms. DiStefano stated that, between April 2019 and November 2023, the EHAA had paid back to the Town $88k for billable emergency medical calls which firefighter EMTs had responded to and noted that the EHAA is the only ambulance service in the state listed as a revenue source for a municipality. She emphasized that the Ambulance Service is part of the community and noted several examples of their volunteer activities; she stated that, in addition to providing a service, they also give back to the Town.

Ms. DiStefano said that the EHAA's quarterly presentations to the Town provide transparency. She stated that the First Selectwoman has admitted that the EHAA stats are good but has never given a reasonable explanation about why the providers of EMS needs to change. She expressed her opinion that the First Selectwoman has tried to manipulate the situation to force the EHAA to fail to meet its financial obligations and stated that it is time to end the "*pettiness and wasteful spending*" and let EHAA provide the service residents deserve.

Ms. DiStefano advised that the EHAA Board members that spoke would like their letters added into the record. (Full text of the comments is attached to these minutes.)

- Lori D'Aquila thanked the Board for their support of EHAA. She stated that the Association has been very fortunate to have a compassionate and dedicated team of volunteers, employees, and Board members for the past 50 years. She provided an overview of her personal history with the EHAA services and stated that the Ambulance Association has been an effective and competent organization and that their performance statistics over the last 5 years have been "*great*".

  Ms. D'Aquila expressed her frustration with the negative statements, mis-information and, what she believes to be, divisive, threatening and baseless attacks on the organization. She asked the Town leadership to make public safety the priority and move forward.

  In closing, Ms. D'Aquila stated that she supports the budgetary structure for the EHAA recommended by Mr. Dill and emphasized that the EHAA is not suing the Town. (Full text of the comments is attached to these minutes.)

Ms. Haines thanked the speakers for their comments.

First Selectman Haines stated that an email from John Mozonski had been received. She read Mr. Mozonski's email which advised that he lives on Bashan Lake and does not intend to purchase a wake surfing boat. Mr. Mozonski reviewed a number of restrictions imposed on water-vessels over the years he has lived there but noted that none of the limitations ever banned the use of a specific vessel type or activity that is not also restricted under DEEP regulations. Mr. Mozonski stated in his email that it is his opinion that if the CT DEEP does not ban wake surfing vessels, then neither should the Town.

7. Unfinished Business

A. Three Bridges Cemetery Discussion and Potential Resolution: Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to materials in their meeting packets regarding Three Bridges Cemetery. She stated that Facilities Director Angersola had received written notice from the property owners with their consent to transfer their ownership and interest in Three Bridges Cemetery to the Town of East Haddam. She advised that a quitclaim deed has been prepared by the Town Attorney and resolutions have been approved to send this property donation to a Town Meeting for acceptance.

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin to adopt the following resolution to be referred to Town Meeting for approval:

RESOLVED, that the Town Meeting authorizes the acceptance by Quitclaim deed from Richard Wayne and Julie Ann Neely a certain parcel of land known as Three Bridges Cemetery containing approximately .27 acres as shown on the Town of East Haddam Assessor's Map 24 Lot 14 and more particularly described as a certain piece or parcel of land, together with the buildings and improvements thereon, situated in the Town of East Haddam County of Middlesex and State of Connecticut as shown as THREE BRIDGES CEM. on the map entitled: "LAND OF THREE BRIDGES NOMINEE TRUST HOPYARD ROAD AND THREE BRIDGES ROAD, EAST HADDAM, Connecticut," said map having a scale of 1"–6", Date 6/25/82, prepared by Richard W. Gates Land Surveyor Main Street Centerbrook, Connecticut, said map on file in the East Haddam land records. A copy of the executed Quitclaim deed shall be attached to this resolution and be made a part thereof.

Unanimous aye.

B. Camoin Associates – Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Policy Discussion: Ms. Haines requested a Board vote on their support for adopting a Tax Increment Financing policy for the Town. She stated the Town will provide optional dates to Camoin Associates and the Redevelopment Agency for scheduling a Public Hearing at which Camoin Associates can provide an educational presentation on tax incentive financing and respond to questions from the public prior to moving the policy forward for a Town vote.

Motion made by Ms. Bourgoin, seconded by Mr. Dill to support adopting a Tax Increment Financing policy for the town and presenting this policy to the residents at a Public Hearing. Unanimous aye.

C. Bashan Lake/Moodus Reservoir – Wake Surfing Potential Ordinance Discussion: Ms. Haines stated that the next steps are to have the Town's attorney review the draft ordinance prohibiting wake surfing vessels on several Town lakes and to schedule a Public Hearing to present and discuss the proposed ordinance. Ms. Zemienieski advised that she needs to update the draft to include Moodus Reservoir.

There was a general discussion regarding moving forward with the ordinance. Mr. Dill stated that he has had discussions with numerous residents about the proposed ordinance and he is not in favor of moving it forward. Ms. Bourgoin stated that she too was not in favor of the ordinance; however, she would like to hear from the public about this issue and, therefore, is in favor of scheduling a Public Hearing.

Motion made by Ms. Bourgoin, seconded by Ms. Haines, to schedule a Public Hearing for the purpose of presenting the draft ordinance prohibiting wake surfing vessels on Bashan Lake and Moodus Reservoir to the citizens for a public discussion. Ms. Haines and Ms. Bourgoin voted aye; Mr. Dill voted nay. The motion passed by a majority of ayes.

8. New Business

A. Grant Acceptance – DOT Active Transportation Microgrant: Ms. Haines advised that the Town had received a grant award under the Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT) in conjunction with the Council of Governments (COGs) for an Active Transportation Microgrant. She stated that the purpose of the grant program is to provide eligible organizations with funding for resources that advance safe, accessible, sustainable and equitable walking, biking and rolling in Connecticut.

Ms. Haines stated that Ms. Thody, from the Middle School, has also been awarded a DOT microgrant and they are working with the DOT to organize a bicycle rodeo in East Haddam. She advised that the Town's microgrant will be used to purchase bike helmets for giveaways at the event and Ms. Thody will use her microgrant to purchase bicycles for her Middle School bike club.

Ms. Haines stated that the Board must accept the grant and send notice of same to the Board of Finance and Town Meeting to complete the acceptance.

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to accept a grant in the amount of $5,000.00 from the Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT) in conjunction with the Council of Government (RiverCOG) for an Active Transportation Microgrant to purchase bike helmets, and send acceptance of said grant to the Board of Finance and Town Meeting for approval. Unanimous aye.

Ms. Haines stated that the Board of Finance took action on this item at their May 12th meeting.

B. Call for Town Meeting: Ms. Haines advised that items approved at previous meetings need be moved forward to a Town Meeting.

Motion made by Ms. Bourgoin, seconded by Mr. Dill, to approve the following call for Town Meeting:

The Electors and citizens of the Town of East Haddam, Connecticut qualified to vote in Town Meeting are hereby warned and notified that a Special Town Meeting will be held in the Municipal Office Complex, Meeting Room 1 & 2 located on 1 Plains Road in Moodus, Connecticut on Wednesday, June 4, 2025 at 8:00 p.m., for the following purposes, to wit:

Item 1: 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 $25,000 from Consumer Reports for the Repair of Hall Kilbourne Road (revenue account 33050-43000-G3401 and expense account 33055011-58820-G3401).

Item 2: To consider and act upon the recommendation of the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance to accept a grant in the amount of $5,000.00 from the Connecticut Department of Transportation (DOT) in conjunction with the Council of Government (RiverCOG) for an Active Transportation Microgrant to purchase bike helmets (revenue account 33050-43000-G3501 and expense account 33055011-58820-G3501).

Item 3: To consider and act upon the recommendation of the Planning and Zoning Commission and Board of Selectmen to accept the following resolution:

RESOLVED, that the Town Meeting authorizes the acceptance by Quitclaim deed from Richard Wayne and Julie Ann Neely a certain parcel of land known as Three Bridges Cemetery containing approximately .27 acres as shown on the Town of East Haddam Assessor's Map 24 Lot 14 and more particularly described as a certain piece or parcel of land, together with the buildings and improvements thereon, situated in the Town of East Haddam County of Middlesex and State of Connecticut as shown as THREE BRIDGES CEM. on the map entitled: "LAND OF THREE BRIDGES NOMINEE TRUST HOPYARD ROAD AND THREE BRIDGES ROAD, EAST HADDAM, Connecticut," said map having a scale of 1"–6", Date 6/25/82, prepared by Richard W. Gates Land Surveyor Main Street Centerbrook, Connecticut said map on file in the East Haddam land records. The proposed deed for this conveyance is available at the Office of the Town Clerk of the Town of East Haddam for public inspection.

Item 4: To consider and act upon the recommendation of the Board of Finance to approve a transfer of $100,000 from Snow Removal in the following budgeted amounts: $83,679 from 10543070-56600 Sand/Salt and $16,321 from 10543070-51510 Regular Employees to 10543550-54303 Tree Care and Removal-Grounds Maintenance for the purpose of increasing the funding for tree removal.

Unanimous aye.

C. CIRMA Commitment Letter: Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to the CIRMA Letter of Commitment for its Budget Stabilization Program, dated February 14, 2025, in their meeting packets. She advised that the Town has participated in the program since 2004 and that the premium payment is shared by the Board of Education (51%) and the Town (49%).

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to authorize the Town to contract with CIRMA for a three-year budget stabilization program for our liability, auto and property (LAP) insurances for the period of 7/1/2025 to 7/01/2028. Unanimous aye.

D. Board/Commission/Committee Changes (PZC, EDC)

Planning & Zoning Commission

Ms. Haines called the Selectmen's attention to correspondence in their packets acknowledging resignations and a change in status on the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Motion made by Ms. Bourgoin, seconded by Mr. Dill to accept, with regret, the resignation of Edmund Gubbins as a regular member of the Planning and Zoning Commission effective May 31, 2025. Unanimous aye.

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin to accept, with regret, the resignation of Stephen Lohmeyer as an alternate member of the Planning and Zoning Commission effective immediately. Unanimous aye.

Motion made by Ms. Bourgoin, seconded by Mr. Dill, to change the status of Susan Kinsman from an alternate member to a regular member to fill a vacancy with a term to expire with the November 2025 election on the Planning and Zoning Commission effective May 31, 2025. Unanimous aye.

Economic Development Commission

Ms. Haines called the Selectmen's attention to the minutes of the 5/15/25 Economic Development Commission meeting.

Motion made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to reappoint Ryan Scully as an alternate member of the Economic Development Commission for a five-year term with a term expiration of June 30, 2030. Unanimous aye.

E. Tax Refunds: Ms. Haines called the Board's attention to two tax refunds.

Motion made by Ms. Bourgoin, seconded by Mr. Dill, to award tax refunds in the amount as presented:

- $333.09 to Toyota Lease Trust, and
- $ 79.23 to VW Credit Leasing LTD.

Unanimous aye.

9. Selectmen's Discussion

A. Liaison's Reports: Ms. Bourgoin reported that the Sustainability Team is supporting the Superhero Training Corps, a newly formed Connecticut-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to inspiring courage, compassion, perseverance, and leadership in the next generation. She stated that they are holding a soft debut with Franklin Academy students who will participate is the May 24th and 25th Superhero Clean-Up Event at Nichols Field and a Townwide clean-up with a focus on the Memorial Day parade route. Ms. Haines said that she applauds all efforts to clean-up the Town.

B. Other

1. Memorial Day Parade (5/26/2025 at 10:00 a.m.): Ms. Haines stated that line-up for the parade will begin at 9:15a.m. and reviewed the agenda of events for the day.

2. Budget Referendum (5/27/2025): Ms. Haines reminded the Board and public about the Budget Referendum scheduled for May 27th and encouraged everyone to get out and vote. In response to a question from Ms. Bourgoin, Ms. Zemienieski reviewed the Board of Finance's plans to conduct an in-person survey outside of the voting place on the day of the referendum.

3. East Haddam Swing Bridge Ribbon Cutting (5/27/2025 at 11:00 a.m.): Ms. Haines advised the Board and public of the CT DOT's Swing Bridge Ribbon Cutting ceremony on May 27th.

10. Adjournment: There being no additional business to discuss, a motion was made by Mr. Dill, seconded by Ms. Bourgoin, to adjourn the meeting at 8:41 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Erik Dill, Secretary

Board of Selectman Meeting 5/21/2025

I have been an EHAA Board Member since 2011. I was also an active EMR/EMT volunteer for 8 years. There were periods of time, I was on the schedule 100 hours up to 150 hours/month. I was passionate about the care the citizens of East Haddam received and was proud to volunteer. I continue to be passionate about the citizens receiving quality care and services.

EHAA is a non-profit 501 C3.

I just want to share that the First Selectman is an Ad Hoc Member of the EHAA Board of Directors. Shortly after our First Selectman was elected 11/2/2021, they attended their first EHAA Board of Directors meeting.

At that meeting the First Selectman stated, "I'm getting a new ambulance company." The First Selectman was asked is that a threat. They responded "Yes".

It seems that the First Selectman made this decision without knowledge of EHAA's performance, the quality of care provided to the citizens of East Haddam, our relationship with the community, the understanding of how EHAA operates and what is involved with running an ambulance service.

EHAA has been navigating this threat for the last three and a half years. During this time, EHAA has continued to provide quality care and service to the citizens of East Haddam in spite of the obstacles put in our path. EHAA is very proud of the care and service we provide to our community.

The legal fees incurred by the town to carry out the threat made by the First Selectman three and a half years ago have been paid by the taxpayers. Is this how we want our tax dollars spent?

The EHAA had prepared a presentation for the BoS to update its status for FY 25 and to request funding to relieve the shortfall projected for the end of FY 25. The plan was to present this at the May 7 meeting. However, the EHAA was unable to be added to the agenda due to an already full docket. When the EHAA asked to be added to the May 12 BoF agenda to present the same information, it was informed that it would not be invited to participate due to pending legal matters and the need to complete a new town agreement. It must be noted that neither circumstance was related nor relevant, to the status update and request for funding, and there was no mention of legal matters in the presentation. The EHAA has consistently forecasted to both the BoS and BoF that there would be an ongoing yearly need for additional funds to sustain the fiscal health of the ambulance service. Concurrently, talk of a revised town agreement, as well OEMS issues, have been ongoing. Neither interfered with the funding request successfully made in FY 24, and neither should be a factor now for FY 25.

Regarding the legal matters, our town leadership has stated that the EHAA was "suing the town". This was a very loose and self-serving interpretation of the filing. To be clear, the "suit" was in fact, only an administrative appeal which was filed in Dec. 2024 with the Superior Court regarding the OEMS final hearing decision, and it pointed out the flaws in that decision. There was no monetary component, and this administrative appeal was basically the same as the those submitted to OEMS during its own respective appeal process. On May 19, a ruling on the administrative appeal was received, that being that it was dismissed by the judge. It's important to note that after this latest administrative appeal was filed, the EHAA conducted several meetings from January 2025 through March 2025 with town representatives, including the Board of Selectmen and the Board of Finance. Clearly, none of these were prohibited. Given that the legal climate has been unchanged, it was illogical that town leadership had "on the advice of counsel" prohibited EHAA from meeting with town government pending the administrative appeal, and holding the EHAA hostage to sign a new town agreement. Additionally, a letter was sent by the EHAA attorney to the Dept of Public health in April stating that the town had not met its obligation to provide ambulance resources and equipment within the DPH's own statute-required six month time frame. The six months started from the final OEMS appeal ruling in Oct 2024, and ended in April 2025. Hence by law, the certification granted by DPH is no longer valid. The administrative appeal submitted to the Superior Court was separate from the OEMS appeals and was not a factor for the six month statute. The broader and most important message though, is that the town's failure to provide the required ambulance resources and capability within the allotted time undermines the position that the town is capable of providing such service, and therefore, it's the residents who would be put at risk.

Regarding the signing of a new town agreement, it must be noted that this activity has not been stagnant. It has been an ongoing process that started last fall for which the EHAA has been engaged. A proposal provided by town leadership was reviewed by EHAA and a subsequent meeting took place with the town, again during the period of time after which the administrative appeal was submitted. Feedback was provided, and town leadership subsequently provided a revised document, which again was reviewed by EHAA. A discussion of that document between the two parties has been rescheduled

several times by the town, so it is still pending, but one could also argue it should not take place until the null and void issue is resolved. It must be noted that even if a new agreement were to be signed imminently, it would not go into effect until FY 26. Therefore, it has no impact and hence, not relevant to the FY 25 funding request.

There is great concern that the ability to go before town leadership was prohibited, especially considering that a funding request was forecasted well in advance. As in FY 24, the intent has been to begin the process early enough to acquire the funds before the end of FY 25. It is critical to note that the funding request is for the sole purpose of sustaining the existing ambulance service to the residents of East Haddam. Furthermore, it is consistent with the message the EHAA has been stating since early in FY 24, that financial assistance is needed to accommodate shortfalls created by expenses that exceed revenue. EHAA is still the certified organization for East Haddam ambulance services, and it is vital to sustain these services for the residents. Prohibiting the EHAA from taking steps needed to maintain its primary objective of service to the residents puts those same residents at risk.

It is imperative to remind town leadership that the very top of the town government organization chart has a box that says that town government reports to the "Voters". Everyone who resides in that box expects the town government (i.e. leadership) to keep the needs of the residents as its focus, within which public safety is a top priority. Clearly, the need for fiscal assistance to sustain the operational performance and quality of the ambulance service is vital to public safety. Our town leadership holding hostage the requests for this assistance by referencing activities that are unrelated to public safety, is both disappointing and alarming, and goes against the expectations residents have of town leadership. It is equally concerning to hear that all members of the BoS have not been informed of these activities. The residents have a "Board" for a reason, that being the avoidance of unilateral decisions that may not be in the best interest of the town. Clearly, these circumstances put public safety in second place, which is both inappropriate and unacceptable behavior.

We must stay focused on doing what's best for the residents. This applies to both the town and the EHAA. The communication of operational and fiscal performance provided regularly by the EHAA, and the funding requests needed to continue that performance, is evidence that the EHAA is committed to ongoing quality service and financial transparency to the public. Our town leadership needs to adopt the same attitude and properly display the leadership behavior the voters expect.

Thank you.

To the Board of Selectmen,

Our town is very fortunate to have a team of EHAA volunteers, employees and Board members so compassionately dedicated to providing the essential emergency medical services to our town for more than 50 years.

I became an EMT and volunteered because I was raised that community service is a way of life. The EHAA was very helpful to our family as my dad was paralyzed and we needed help transporting him in a flat position to and from medical facilities. Back then we could do that! I stopped volunteer work to raise my family work and go back to school, I returned to EHAA in 1999 as my grandmother's generation was waiting an hour for mutual aid ambulance from another town because EHAA did not have enough volunteers. Then I continued to volunteer because my mother's generation needed us. Many of the people calling 911 are our teachers, leaders, coaches, neighbors, friends and relatives. I have been honored to help to repay them for all they have done for our townspeople.

I have been asked many times why I continue to do this, especially with political climate of the last few years. EVERYONE in our town deserves to have the high-quality emergency services that we provide at little cost to the taxpayers. They deserve our care and the compassion that we have for all that we do on a daily basis. If you haven't heard me say this before: we respond quickly, quietly and competently to assess, treat and transport anyone in need. We go home and don't talk about it because of the nature of the services we provide. EHAA is here for all of you, but you won't know it until you need us.

We have proven that we are an effective competent organization in spite of all of the obstacles that have been thrown in our way. Our board manages the organization and we have great EMTs. Our performance data has been excellent for five years straight. Our biggest issues are the local politics and finances.

Tonight, I believe you've heard only a portion of how EHAA has been treated. We always took the high road because we believed in our mission and the services we continue to deliver to our community.

However, you are now hearing our frustrations after three and a half years of negative statements, misinformation, divisive and threatening behaviors and attacks on our organization. Our attempts to work together have failed.

Please help us to continue to do the work we do. It's well past the time for the town to stop wasting our time, your time, our funds and the taxpayers' dollars on something you cannot accomplish. Let's stop all this "takeover" nonsense and make Public Safety the priority of the town leadership, as it is and always has been the EHAA priority.

Another request is that the Town Please set up a funding plan for EHAA so that we do not have to endure all of the drama associated with our financial requests.

I'd like to thank everyone who has listened and supported us during the past few years. We greatly appreciate it.

By the way to be clear, EHAA is NOT suing the town, let me repeat that, we are NOT suing the town. I would like to make that public because many people have been told we are.

Laurie D'Aquila

May 21, 2025

Board of Selectman Meeting – 05/21/2025

The First Selectman's intention to push the Ambulance Association out and to have the Fire Department take over as providers of EMS services in town, was surprising. I was offended by our Town Leader publicly denigrating EHAA, while speaking positively about the EHFD. She seemed to disregard the fact that she was speaking publicly about community members she was elected to represent. I followed posts online and letters in our local paper, trying to understand what was going on, and eventually started writing letters of my own in support of EHAA, and sharing positive experiences I'd had with them first hand.

Laurie D'Aquila approached me about joining the EHAA Board of Directors. Even though I had a prior experience of sitting on an Executive Board of a 501-C3, my immediate reaction was to say, "No." I had no knowledge of, or background in EMS services, and felt I was unqualified. However, after serious consideration, I realized I had the exact skill set that made me appropriate to join the Board. Like the other members before me, I believe in EHAA's mission of providing compassionate, professional EMS care to our community, and am willing to roll up my sleeves to do the work required to help that remain a reality, even in the toxic environment we find ourselves in. Joining the Board was one of the easier life decisions I've made.

Throughout this years' long process, our First Selectman has repeatedly spread false or misleading information about EHAA and EMS. She has claimed that the Town already spends nearly $800,000 on EMS services each year, without substantiating that statement. She has claimed entire portions of the Fire Department budget are attributable to EMS, when they aren't. She has complained that the town pays nearly $9,000 a year for paramedic coverage, as though she is doing EHAA a favor. She is not. Each town is contractually obligated to pay a per capita fee to Middlesex Hospital, to make use of their paramedics, not the ambulance organization providing the EMS service to the Town.

What our Town Leader refuses to acknowledge however, is that between April of 2019 and November 2023, EHAA has given back over $88,000 to the town for the use of the Career Firefighter / EMTs making billable EMS calls during their shifts. We are the only ambulance service in the state of Connecticut to be listed as a revenue source for a municipality. We have frequently used our own employees to cover scheduling shortages for the Town staff, often being overtime for our crew, resulting in significant increases in our labor expenses. EHAA also once paid about $7,000 for renovations to the Company 1 Firehouse. EHAA remounted its own ambulance saving the town $300,000 for the purchase of a new ambulance. We are a part of this community. We provide a service. And we give back.

Our first Selectman has publicly stated, "My goal is to provide public safety. That's my job." And yet, for the last couple of weeks, she has prevented EHAA from making a presentation to either the BOS or BOF, or to be on the agenda until we did something for her that had nothing to do with our presentation. For some time, we have been making quarterly presentations to the town to be completely transparent about our finances. Along with this planned presentation to maintain transparency, we intended to make a funding request to cover our predicted shortfall. If we were not allowed to make our presentation, we would not be able to make our funding request. Without that assistance, we would not be able to meet our financial obligations. I can only assume that our Town Leader would prefer to see us fail, and for the town to be left without an EMS provider, to try to gain control of the situation. Even if this were to come to pass, EHAA would still hold the PSAR, but East Haddam would be without Emergency Medical Services. This is playing Russian roulette with the health and safety of our community, the very people she claims to protect.

I don't know what's behind our Leader's agenda to take over EMS service in town, and I don't really care to, as it's just background noise I'm not interested in getting caught up in. What I do know for sure, is that it has nothing to do with our performance, as she, herself, has stated publicly, that our performance stats are good. The Town has never given a reasonable explanation for why the service needs to change and how such a change will benefit us. We've also been shown no evidence that this type of change would even be successful. Our leader has spent untold amounts of taxpayer money, chasing a desire to push EHAA out, an action and process that was unilaterally initiated, utterly divorced from taxpayer input. It's time to end this pettiness and wasteful spending, and let the EHAA get on with the business of providing our community with the thoughtful, reliable care they've come to know and deserve.

Denise Di Stefano