

**TOWN OF EAST HADDAM**  
**Board of Finance**  
Regular Meeting Minutes  
May 12, 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  
Harvey Thomas

Absent: Eric Kolasinski

Others: Valerie Belles, Finance Director  
Lori D’Aquila, East Haddam Ambulance Association  
Denise DiStefano, Citizen  
And other members of the public

**CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Mr. Gelston called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

**GUESTS & AUDIENCE COMMENTS**

Mr. Gelston reviewed the agenda and opened the meeting to comments from guests and audience.

**Denise DiStefano** expressed her concern about increases to the Public Works FY2025-2026 Snow Removal budget line item and end-of-year transfers to the Tree Removal budget. Ms. Belles provided information about how the Snow Removal budget is calculated and noted that overtime hours are contractual. She advised that the transfers to the Tree Removal budget occur only if there is excess in the Snow Removal budget at the end of the fiscal year and stated that the process has been in place for many years.

In response to Ms. DiStefano’s stated concerns about Public Works staffing, Mr. Thomas advised that a Board of Selectmen meeting would be the more appropriate venue to raise questions/concerns that are operational in nature. Mr. Gelston stated he would pass her questions onto First Selectwoman Haines.

Ms. DiStefano expressed her disappointment that, at the recent Public Hearing, Ms. Haines was not prepared to provide specifics about what cuts would be made to the Town’s FY2025-2026 budget. She thanked the Board of Finance for their work.

**Lori D'Aquila** read a letter from Ken Tosi about the fact that the East Haddam Ambulance Association had not been permitted to provide its quarterly update at a recent Board of Selectmen's meeting "*due to pending legal matters*". It was noted that the members of the BOF all received copies of Mr. Tosi's letter along with the EHAA's quarterly update presentation.

### **CORRESPONDENCE**

Mr. Gelston called the Board's attention to the following emails in their meeting packets:

From Robert Simmons, dated April 30, 2025, expressing his appreciation for the Board's efforts. Mr. Simmons stated that he was prepared to vote "yes" on the budget; however, he stated he was "*concerned about the use of \$2.6 M to mitigate the tax increase*". He also wrote, that "*As a senior on a fixed income, it is harder to meet the ever-growing costs of living in Connecticut.*"

From Maureen Pierson, dated April 30, 2025, expressing her support for the BOE budget. She voiced her concern about the Town's side of the budget and stated that it was "*...obvious to me and the townspeople, that the \$500,00 could be easily cut from the town side of the budget sparing the education budget this time*".

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. April 29<sup>th</sup> Public Hearing Minutes – Mr. Gelston called the Board's attention to the minutes of the April 29, 2025 Public Hearing in their meeting packets.

**Mr. Barney made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 29, 2025 Public Hearing as written. Ms. Goff seconded the motion.**

Mr. Gelston noted that the minutes in the Board's meeting packets were incomplete and Ms. Belles left the meeting to make corrected copies.

Mr. Barney and Ms. Goff withdrew their motion and second to approve the April 29<sup>th</sup> Public Hearing minutes.

**Motion made by Mr. Barney to postpone the approval of the minutes until later in the meeting. Ms. Goff seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously. Motion carried.**

### **2025-2026 BUDGET**

- a. Exit Poll Survey – Mr. Gelston and the Board discussed various options for conducting a survey on the budget. Most of the members favored asking voters who left the referendum to fill out a brief paper survey; however, Ms. Goff stated her preference for a phone survey. There was a general discussion regarding the pros and cons of the two approaches.

**Motion made by Mr. Thomas to conduct a paper poll immediately following the FY2025-2026 budget referendum. Mr. Barney seconded the motion. Messrs. Gelston, Thomas, Corbett, and Barney voted aye; Ms. Goff voted nay. The motion carried by a majority of ayes.**

The Board agreed to ask the following questions on the poll:

1. Is the Board of Selectmen's budget: too high / just about right / too low?
2. Is the Board of Education's budget: too high / just about right / too low?
3. Additional Comments.

The Board member discussed logistics for conducting the survey and several members volunteered to staff the polling station.

- b. Discuss Special Meeting After Referendum – The Board discussed scheduling special meetings following the budget referendum. It was agreed that if the budget passes, they would meet at 8:30 p.m. that evening to set a mil rate. The Board did not, at this time, schedule a meeting date in the event the budget fails referendum.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- a. April 29<sup>th</sup> Public Hearing Minutes – Ms. Belles distributed updated copies of the minutes of the April 29<sup>th</sup> Public Hearing. In response to a question raised by Mr. Gelson, it was agreed to include a statement in the minutes that copies of the students' letters to the BOF would be available in the Finance Department's office.

**Motion made by Mr. Barney to approve the minutes of the April 29, 2025 Public Hearing as amended. Ms. Goff seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

- b. April 29<sup>th</sup> Special Meeting Minutes - Ms. Belles distributed updated copies of the minutes of the BOF's April 29<sup>th</sup> Special Meeting.

**Motion made by Mr. Barney to approve the minutes of the Board of Finance's April 29, 2025 Special Meeting as written. Ms. Goff seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

### **CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

- c. Board Sub-Committee Reports
  - i. Communications – Mr. Gelston reported that the Communications Sub-Committee is working on drafting several articles for publication in upcoming East Haddam News editions.

- ii. Long-Range Capital Improvements Committee – Mr. Thomas noted that significant modifications to the capital requests ranking process had been made during the FY2025-2026 budget development season. He expressed his opinion that such deviations from the standard process undermine the value of the Committee’s efforts and stated he would like to see the process tightened up going forward.
- iii. Financial Policies – Mr. Thomas reported that the Financial Policies Sub-Committee’s next project will be to update the BOF’s policy for requesting its approval to apply for grants to include a waiver of the requirement for small grants that do not require any matching or on-going expenditures for the Town.

### **FIRST SELECTMEN’S REPORT**

First Selectwoman Haines was not in attendance at the meeting, therefor discussion of this agenda item was postponed.

### **FINANCE DIRECTOR’S REPORT**

- a. 2024-2025 YTD Budget Reports – Ms. Belles called the Board’s attention to the end of March financials in their meeting packets. She stated that, nine months into the budget, 56% has been expended and 83% of the projected revenues have been collected. She noted that the Audit line item is over budget due to the fact that part of the work for the FY2023 audit fell into this fiscal year. In response to a question from the Board, Ms. Belles provided information on the status of the Tree Removal budget.
- b. FY 2023-2024 Audit Update – Ms. Belles reported that the FY 2023-2024 audit was filed prior to April 30<sup>th</sup> and she has ordered printed copies for all of the Board members. She reviewed the impact of staffing attrition on the end of year closings and advised that she is drafting EOY closing guidelines and a check-list for the Town’s future use. She reiterated that she has applied for the government’s Financial Officials Association’s Excellence in Reporting award for the FY2023-2024 financials.
- c. Bonding Update – Ms. Belles reported that the Town had reviewed its official public statement with S&P representatives and has once again secured an AA+ bond rating. She advised that, on May 20<sup>th</sup>, the Town will be going out to bid for a bonding package for roads, bridges, and large fire equipment.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

There was no old business discussed at the meeting.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

**Motion made by Mr. Barney to add item c. “Grant Acceptance - Department of Transportation RiverCOG Micro Grant” to the New Business agenda. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

- a. Transfer Request from Ice/Snow Budget to Tree and Road Reclamation Budgets – Mr. Gelston called the Board’s attention to materials in their meeting packets related to this agenda item.

**Motion was made by Ms. Goff to transfer \$100,000.00 from the Snow Removal budget in the following amounts: \$83,679.00 from 10543070-56600 (Sand/Salt) and \$16,321.00 from 10543070-51510 (Regular Employees) to 10543550-54303 (Grounds Maintenance Tree Removal), and to request that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Barney seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

- b. Gift Acceptance – Consumer’s Union – Mr. Gelston called the Board’s attention to materials in their meeting packets related to this agenda item. Ms. Belles advised that every year Consumer’s Union gifts an amount towards a Town project. She stated that this year their \$20,000.00 contribution will help fund repairs to Hall Kilbourne Road.

**Motion was made by Mr. Barney to accept a gift from Consumer Reports in the amount of \$20,000.00 to be used as partial funding of repairs to Hall Kilbourn Road (revenue account 33050-43000-G3401 and expense account 33055011-58820-G3401) and to recommend that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Corbett seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

- c. Grant Acceptance – Department of Transportation RiverCOG Micro Grant - Mr. Gelston called the Board’s attention to materials in their meeting packets related to this agenda item.

**Motion was made by Mr. Barney to accept a grant from the CT Department of Transportation (DOT) in conjunction with the Council of Government (RiverCOG) in the amount of \$5,000.00 to purchase bike helmets (revenue account 33050-43000-G3501 and expense account 33055011-58820-G3501) and to recommend that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Corbett seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved. Motion carried.**

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**Motion made by Mr. Barney to adjourn the meeting at 8:28 p.m. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.**

Respectfully submitted,  
/s/  
William Barney  
Secretary