TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance – Special Meeting
April 7, 2026
Municipal Office Building – Room 1 & 2
Via Zoom and YouTube Live

Participating: Joseph Corbett
Debra Denette
Maureen Goff
Scott W. Jezek
Harvey Thomas
Absent: Eric Kolasinski

Others: V. Belles; First Selectman T. Gelston, and other members of the public

1. Call to Order

Chairperson Goff called the meeting to order and led attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. 2026-2027 Budget

a. Discussion and Potential Adjustments Following the Public Hearing

Ms. Goff opened discussion for any proposed adjustments to the budget following the public hearing.

- Mr. Thomas: Had no comments or proposed changes.
- Mr. Jezek: Initially did not support the earlier version of the budget and sought further decreases; however, after hearing public input, he expressed support for the budget as currently presented, emphasizing future discussions on revenue enhancements.
- Ms. Denette: Highlighted the Town's high per-student educational investment ($24 million for ~940 students) and encouraged finding efficiencies, repurposing resources, and consolidating where possible.
- Mr. Corbett:
    - Referenced Middletown's fiscal challenges as an example of broader economic pressures such as inflation, lost federal aid, and slow grand list growth.
    - Expressed concern that underfunding today could increase future costs.
    - Called attention to the need for strong collaboration between the Boards of Finance, Education, and Selectmen.
    - Thanked Superintendent DeBrito and BOE Chair Kira Thompson for their cooperative efforts.
    - Suggested more transparent community communication concerning interfund transfers and local fund structures ("Purple Fund" and "Ray Fund"), proposing easily understandable visuals and outreach through the *East Haddam News* and other Town communication channels.
    - Noted possible future consideration of new revenue sources such as traffic enforcement cameras.

- Concluded by supporting the proposed budget's submission to the Town and encouraging community engagement in the voting process.

Ms. Goff agreed that inter-board communication and educational outreach to residents would be beneficial. Finance Director Belles noted that ClearGov software can produce various visualizations of revenue and expenditure data to help with community understanding.

Ms. Goff reiterated that FY 2025–2026 is a fiscally challenging year requiring restraint. She thanked the BOE for its cooperation in using available surplus and capital funds responsibly and expressed continued support for the budget as presented.

b. Guest and Audience Comments

Jessica Hatfield – East Colchester Turnpike

- Asked whether exit surveys, as used during last year's budget vote, would be conducted again. Ms. Goff replied that the board would discuss that at an upcoming regular BOF meeting.

Jeff Wolter – 16 Chittenden Lane

- Commended the Board's work in reducing fund balance dependency.
- Cautioned about legal reviews of the Purple Fund and Ray Fund, noting that if the BOE prevails in those revenue claims, it could result in a $600,000 payment obligation from the Town.
- Advised careful collaboration and communication to avoid fiscal surprises.
- Confirmed concern about maintaining an adequate fund balance (~8%).

Keira Thompson – Taylor Hill (Board of Education Chair)

- Noted that this year's public hearing attendance was the lowest in her five budget cycles, with only six speakers and suggested community burnout with the budget process.
- Clarified that while enrollment has declined slightly, it does not justify closing a school and that consolidation would require costly long-term planning and facilities expansion.

c. Vote to Send Budget to Town Meeting

Motion made by Ms. Denette to present to the annual budget meeting scheduled to be called by the Board of Selectmen for April 21, 2026 at 8:00 p.m. at the Nathan Hale Ray High School auditorium. a total budget of $43,841,297.00, based on the Grand List as of October 1, 2025 of $1,205,671,237.00. The budget would require a reduction of the FY2025-2026 budget of 2.88% in expenditures, a mill rate increase of 61 mills, and a 3.47% increase in tax revenues. Mr. Thomas seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

3. Adjournment

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

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
Debra Denette
Secretary