TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance – Regular Meeting
March 9, 2026
Municipal Office Building – Room 1 & 2
Via Zoom and YouTube Live

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

Others: V. Belles; L. D'Aquila; D. D'Stephano; First Selectman T. Gelston; L. Woodward; J. Wolter, and other members of the public

CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Ms. Goff called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and the attendees said the pledge of allegiance.

GUEST AND AUDIENCE COMMENTS

Mr. Wolter stated that during the Public Hearing on the FY25-26 budget some residents expressed concern about the reliance on using money from Fund Balance to mitigate the impact on the mil rate. He advised that the public is also aware that the goal of the BOF this budget season is to present a zero increase budget but he noted that a zero increase budget does not guarantee the mil rate will not be increased. In fact, he said, without any increase in revenue, a zero increase budget for FY26-27 would result in a 2.3% increase in the Town's mil rate.

Mr. Wolter further noted that the Fund Balance is currently at approximately $7.3M and expressed concern about taking additional funds from that source to supplement the FY26-27 budget as it might risk violating the BOF's policy to maintain specific levels of Fund Balance. Mr. Wolter stated he recognized the challenges the BOF is facing and encouraged them to make every effort to communicate to the public this information early in the budget season.

Ms. Goff thanked Mr. Wolter for his comments and confirmed that the BOF would not violate its policy on maintaining Fund Balance at a compliant level.

CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence discussed at the meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Approval of February 9, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes – Ms. Goff called the Board's attention to the January 9, 2026 draft minutes in their meeting packets and asked if the Board had any

corrections. Mr. Jezek stated that he would like to have his objection at being excluded from Ms. Goff's meeting with representatives from the BOE and the Town where they discussed the reasons behind the reported surplus in the BOE's unaudited FY2025-2026 budget as of June 25th. At the February 9th meeting, his objection was supported by Ms. Denette who stated that the meeting should have been conducted as a public meeting with a posted agenda and minutes and by Mr. Thomas who stated that he felt there was no reason not to allow other BOF members who had an interest in the subject to attend and observe.

Motion made by Mr. Jezek to approve the minutes of the February 9, 2026 regular meeting minutes as amended. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion. Mr. Kolasinski abstained from the vote and the motion was approved by a majority aye vote. Motion carried.

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

a. Liaison Updates

Ms. Goff reported that she had wanted to be sure that she had not done anything improper regarding her meeting with representatives from the BOE and the Town to discuss and understand the reasons behind the reported surplus in the BOE's unaudited FY2025-2026 budget and her decision not to post an agenda or have the meeting recorded. To that end, she advised that Ms. Zemienieski has reached out to Russel Blair, Director of Education and Communication of the CT Freedom of Information Commission who confirmed that the meeting did not have to be posted. Mr. Blair further stated that, "… *it is not unusual that chairs of these boards have meetings to go over budget things outside of the regular BOF, BOS or BOE meetings*".

Mr. Jezek stated that he was not willing to accept an opinion concerning a question for which he did not know the exact wording. Ms. Goff stated she would forward Mr. Jezek the email exchange with Director Blair, which included Ms. Zemenieski's question, and add this item to the BOF's next regular meeting agenda to ensure everyone has the same understanding of the guidance Mr. Blair provided.

There were no additional liaison updates provided at the meeting.

b. Board Subcommittee Reports

- Communications – It was noted that another Citizen's Guide to the Budget will be published at the end of the month.

- Long-Range Capital Improvements Committee – In response to a question from Mr. Thomas, Ms. Belles confirmed that the score cards on ClearGov are working and prioritizing Capital requests according to the weights assigned. She stated that she will have a spreadsheet with all Capital requests prioritized by score card rankings, and also by funding sources, to present at the BOF's March 14th budget workshop meeting.

- Financial Policies – There was no update on this subcommittee's work.

FIRST SELECTMEN'S REPORT

First Selectman Gelston provided the following report:

- Public Works and their plowing contractors did a great job clearing the roads during the latest snow storm. He noted that there will be a small increase in the Snow/Ice Removal budget line for FY2026-2027.
- The Town is still working on reducing speeding in Town; however, he is still waiting for the DOT's approval to post "Speeding Strictly Enforced" signs at the Towns entry points.
- The agreement drafted by the Ambulance Association and Fire Department at their workshops was reviewed by the Town's attorney who made no changes. The Association and Fire Department will review the agreement one last time and sign it at their March 13th workshop.
- It appears that there is still interest by one or more companies in constructing a cell tower on Town property.
- The Black Birch Feasibility Committee has been established and their first meeting will be held on March 16th. He noted the Committee has no budget and will be operating at no cost to the Town.
- The BOS approved and formed a USA 250 Celebration Committee to create and execute a plan for East Haddam's celebration. He stated that the goal is to use donations, grants, and sponsorships to pay for the Town's celebration.

Mr. Gelston responded to several questions from the Board.

FINANCE DIRECTOR'S

a. YTD Financials - Ms. Belles called the Board's attention to the year-to-date financials in their meeting packets. In response to questions from Ms. Denette, she agreed to follow-up on the status of property tax payments due in January. In response to a question from Mr. Jezek, Ms. Belles provided clarification about a discrepancy he noted in the Debt Service budget.

b. Audit Update - Ms. Goff reported that she has been reaching out to the BOE and Finance Department regarding a list of outstanding items needed to finalize the audit. Ms. Belles noted that the auditors need 2-3 weeks to review the materials in order to file the Town's audited finance statements with the state by the end of April. Ms. Goff stated that she would inform the BOE and Finance Department to confirm that all the information will be provided to the auditors no later than the first week of April.

OLD BUSINESS

a. East Haddam Ambulance Association Budget Request – Ambulance Association Chairwoman D'Aquila introduce the Association's Finance Committee members Lynn Woodward and Denise D'Stephano. Ms. D'Aquila provided an overview of the Association's performance statistics, accomplishments, and staffing challenges. She reported that as of February 28th the Association's current deficit is $33,606.00 and their unpaid bills are $36,518.00 for a total deficit of $70,124.00.

Ms. D'Aquila advised that $75k for the Association had been approved in the BOF's FY25-25 Contingency budget line and that they are requesting that $75k at this time to pay their outstanding bills. She responded to questions from the Board and provided clarification about the deficit balance. There was a general discussion regarding the Association's request and, in response to a question from Mr. Corbett, First Selectman Gelston advised that the BOS would like to see the Ambulance Association receive those funds.

The Board discussed the Ambulance Association's request to release the $75k in Contingency to them. In response to a question from Mr. Thomas, Ms. D'Aquila confirmed that the expectation is that the Association will continue to operate in a deficit due to the low reimbursement rates from the state and stated that they provide a vital community service that they hope the Town would be willing to subsidize going forward.

Mr. Gelston discussed the agreement the Ambulance Association and Fire Department have drafted and stated that the goal is to have the two entities work together to provide a capable workforce with appropriate equipment that can respond to all of the Town's emergency medical calls. He noted however, that given the current reimbursement rates from the state, there will always be a deficit.

Motion made by Mr. Corbett to approve funding for the East Haddam Ambulance Association from the FY2026-2026 Board of Finance Contingency account 1054102-58911 in the amount of $75,000.00 and request the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. The motion was seconded by Ms. Denette.

Mr. Corbett thanked First Selectman Gelston for bringing the Ambulance Association and Fire Department to the table to craft an agreement and stated he would be in favor of the motion to fund the Association and give them a year to put their agreement with the Fire Department into effect. Several Board members stated that they would not be comfortable with approving the Association's request until they have had time to review the agreement.

Ms. Belles confirmed that, statutorily, any request for funding from Contingency of $20k or greater, or subsequent to an initial funding from Contingency, must be approved at a Town Meeting. Ms. D'Aquila conferred with Ms. Woodward and Ms. D' D'Stephano and they agreed that the Association could accept less than $75k at this time and they would provide the BOF with the Association's and Fire Department's agreement as soon as it is signed which they expected would happen at their March 13th workshop.

Mr. Corbett made a motion to withdraw his earlier motion and to approve funding for the East Haddam Ambulance Association from the FY2026-2026 Board of Finance Contingency account 1054102-58911 in the amount of $19,900.00. The motion was seconded by Ms. Denette.

In response to a question, Mr. Gelston stated that the agreement is an addendum to the existing agreement with the Town and, therefore, did not have to be approved at a Town Meeting.

Ms. Goff called for a short recess at 8:27 p.m. and the meeting reconvened at 8:30 p.m. She called for a vote on Mr. Corbett's motion and Mr. Jezek stated he is prepared to support the motion because the Ambulance Association provides a service to the community and any additional funding request would have to go to Town Meeting for approval.

Mr. Kolasinski and Mr. Thomas voted nay, Mr. Corbett Ms. Goff, Ms. Denette and Mr. Jezek voted aye and the motion was approved by a majority of ayes. Motion carried.

Ms. Goff stated she would include a review of the Ambulance Association and Fire Department's agreement on the agenda for the BOF's next regular meeting.

In response to a question from Mr. Kolasinski, Ms. Goff confirmed that as the Public Safety liaison, Mr. Kolasinski could attend the Ambulance Association's meetings as well as the Fire Department's meetings. Ms. D'Aquila advised that the Ambulance Association meets on the fourth Monday of the month at 6:00 p.m. at the Grange Hall.

There was no other Old Business discussed at the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business discussed at the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion made by Ms. Denette to adjourn the meeting at 8:34 p.m. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
/s/
Debra Denette
Secretary