TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
Board of Finance - Regular Meeting
April 13, 2026 – 7:00 PM
Meeting Rooms 1 & 2 / YouTube Live

Participating:

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

Others: L. D'Aquila; T. Gelston, M. Kolek; S. Laddy-Locks, and other members of the public

1. Call to Order and Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Goff called to order at 7:00 PM. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

2. Guest and Audience Comments

Spencer Laddy-Locks (EHFD representative) – Mr. Laddy-Locks read a formal letter addressed to First Selectman Gelston on behalf of the EHFD outlining the department's efforts to cooperate with the East Haddam Ambulance Association (EHAA) to stabilize local ambulance operations. The statement summarized EHFD's proposed solutions, such as placing a third ambulance in service, providing mutual-aid coverage, and conducting a fiscal and operational analysis for assuming 24/7 ambulance responsibilities.

Mr. Laddy-Locks expressed frustration at EHAA's lack of engagement and transparency regarding their financial condition, citing inconsistent fiscal reporting, unpaid service reimbursements, and staffing challenges. The letter concluded that EHFD remains willing to discuss a formal transition of ambulance services only if all parties commit to a viable plan.

Ken Tosi (EHAA Representative) - Mr. Tosi responded to the EHFD letter, expressing disappointment that it was read publicly during ongoing workshops meant to promote collaboration between the fire department and ambulance association. He stated that progress had been made under the First Selectman's facilitated group and cautioned against public disputes, emphasizing optimism about continuing cooperative discussions.

Captain Melanie Kolek (EHFD) – Captain Kolek commended the working group's efforts and clarified that EHFD's statements were not intended as a "hostile takeover." She noted that statewide EMS organizations face similar financial pressures, and the fire department believes it can provide combined fire and EMS services more efficiently and at lower cost. She expressed EHFD's commitment to transparency, fiscal responsibility, and ensuring public safety for East Haddam residents.

Lori D'Aquila (EHAA) – Ms. D'Aquila clarified a prior misstatement at a previous BOF meeting, explaining she did not say EHAA would "fold in five years" but rather that mutual-aid partners had predicted significant changes across regional EMS operations in that time. She presented EHAA operational data emphasizing strong performance, two-minute average dispatch-to-enroute times, and successful volunteer recruitment. She described current staffing (7 volunteers, 12 paid EMTs), training processes, and plans for scholarships to increase volunteer membership while reducing costs.

3. Correspondence

Correspondence was received and discussed later in the meeting. The discussion is reported in these minutes under Item 9a (Board of Education Fund Transfer Request).

4. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Goff called the Board's attention to several sets of minutes in their meeting packets.

a. Approval of March 9, 2026 Special Meeting Minutes - There being no changes to the minutes, the March 9, 2026 special meeting minutes were accepted as distributed.

b. Approval of March 9, 2026 Regular Meeting Minutes – There being no changes to the minutes, the March 9, 2026 regular meeting minutes were accepted as distributed.

c. Approval of March 14, 2026 Special Meeting Minutes – The minutes of the March 14, 2026 special meeting were accepted with one correction: remove Mr. Scott as participant.

d. Approval of March 19, 2026 Special Meeting Minutes - The minutes of the March 19, 2026 special meeting were accepted with one correction: change "Gross" to "Goff" at the top of page 3.

e. Approval of March 21, 2026 Special Meeting Minutes – The minutes of the March 21, 2026 special meeting were accepted with one correction: change: "BOG" to "BOF" on page 1 under agenda item 2026-2027 BUDGET, a. Debt Service.

5. Chairman's Report

a. Discussion of the April 7, 2026 Public Hearing – Ms. Goff reported the hearing went smoothly and appeared to have general public support for the proposed budget.

b. FY 2024–2025 Audit – The Board expects the audit issuance in May. The Board must appoint an auditor by June 1, likely continuing with the current firm for one additional year. Ms. Goff will coordinate meetings between the auditor, town staff, and Board of Education to streamline audit deliverables for next cycle.

Discussion followed regarding whether to conduct another budget exit poll during the upcoming referendum. Consensus: no exit poll will be conducted unless the referendum fails.

6. First Selectman's Report

First Selectman Todd Gelston provided updates on several town initiatives:

- Public Works: Drainage issues on Maple Avenue, Great Hillwood, and East Haddam Colchester Tpke. will delay paving until next year. The focus this year will be on Hemlock Valley, Bone Mill 1 & 2, Old Town Street, Hungerford, and Cold Spring Roads, with an estimated paving cost of $1.2 million.
- Public Safety: Deployment of radar speed signs and police traffic monitoring continues.
- Ambulance Workshop: Cooperative group discussions between EHFD and EHAA are progressing; near completion of a short-term operations and revenue plan.
- Revenue Development: Two cell tower providers remain interested in Town-owned property on 7 Hood Lane.
- Economic Development: The East Haddam Village Redevelopment Agency hosted a successful public workshop; planning continues for revitalization.
- Black Birch Golf Course: Feasibility Study Committee anticipates providing the BOS with their recommendations by late June.
- America's 250th Anniversary Celebration: Events planned throughout 2026, including a major July 11 celebration at the First Church of Christ and the Grange Hall. Funding efforts include state grant applications and local sponsorships.

7. Finance Director's Report

No report was included for this meeting.

8. Old Business

No items were presented.

9. New Business

a. Budget Appropriation Request – Board of Education – Ms. Goff advised that she had received a letter from Superintendent DeBrito requesting the transfer of surpluses from fiscal years 2023 and 2024.

Motion made by Ms. Denette to approve a transfer in the amount of $51,164 from general fund 1054910-58928 to the Board of Education reserve fund 3320-10506-25790 to appropriate the surplus from FY2023 and to request that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion.

In response to questions from Mr. Jezek, Ms. Goff confirmed that the BOE's total surplus for FY2023 was $51,164 and the approval of their request would not impact the BOF's decisions on any future request by the BOE to transfer a surplus. She called for a vote on the motion.

The motion was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

Motion made by Mr. Kolasinski to approve a transfer in the amount of $163,045 from general fund 1054910-58928 to the Board of Education reserve fund 3320-10506-25790 to appropriate the surplus from FY2024 and to request that the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Ms. Denette seconded the motion and it was approved by a unanimous aye vote. Motion carried.

b. Funding Request – East Haddam Ambulance Association (EHAA) –There was an extended discussion, including review of EHAA's midyear financials, projected shortfalls, and questions about long-term service models.

Mr. Corbett made a motion move to approve funding for the East Haddam Ambulance Association in the amount of $78,620 which had been recommended by the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Denette seconded the motion. Ms. Goff opened the floor to discussion of the motion

Debate included whether EHAA had exhausted cost-saving measures, the fire department's readiness to assume service, and the need for a definitive transition or continuity plan before September 2027. Mr. Corbett and Ms. Denette withdrew their motion and second.

Motion made by Mr. Corbett to approve funding for the East Haddam Ambulance Association from the FY2025-2026 Board of Finance Contingency account 1054102-58911 in the amount of $68,520 and request the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Ms. Denette seconded the motion.

In response to question from Ms. Denette, Mr. Gelston advised that a Town Meeting would be scheduled as soon as possible.

Mr. Corbett, Ms. Goff, and Ms. Denette voted aye. Mr. Thomas, Mr. Kolasinski and Mr. Jezek voted no. The motion did not carry. Ms. Goff called for further discussion. After further discussion,

Motion made by Mr. Corbett to approve funding for the East Haddam Ambulance Association from the FY2025-2026 Board of Finance Contingency account 1054102-58911 in the amount of $55,100 and request the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Mr. Kolasinski seconded the motion. Mr. Corbett, Ms. Goff, and Ms. Denette, Mr. Kolasinski and Mr. Jezek voted aye. Mr. Thomas voted no. The motion was approved by a majority of aye votes. The motion carried.

c. Bequest Acceptance – Estate of Ruth M. Grunberg - Ms. Goff called the Board's attention to materials in their meeting packet concerning a $10,000 bequest to be used by the Rathbun Free Memorial Library.

Motion made by Mr. Corbett to accept, with gratitude, a bequest in the amount of $10,000 from the estate of Ruth M. Grunberg to be used exclusively for the Rathbun Free Memorial Library. Revenue account 330550-4300-G3901 and expense account 330-55011-58820-G3901 and request the Board of Selectmen schedule a Town Meeting for approval. Ms. Denett seconded the motion. Mr. Jezek abstained from the vote due to a family connection to the Library Board and the motion was approved by a majorities of aye votes. Motion carried.

10. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at approximately 9:07 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Debra Denette
Recording Secretary