

# Town of

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# East Lyme

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East Lyme Selectmen:

Attached is the working draft of the Town Budget for the 2025-2026 Fiscal Year.

Over the past month, Kevin Gervais, our Finance Director, and I, met with Department Heads and the various agencies and commissions regarding their budget submissions. Budget increases required documented justification. While developing the budget, service and value for East Lyme's residents and taxpayers was a top priority. East Lyme has enjoyed steady progress over many years. It has become a destination for many across the region. Continuing to adequately and efficiently provide these necessary services requires renewed emphasis on fiscal responsibility and genuine concern for the taxpayers' ability to pay.

As we review this budget and plan for the coming fiscal year, it is important to consider the continuing inflationary spiral that has not been experienced in decades. The higher costs for health insurance, pension obligations, services and materials have had a significant impact on the budget request for FY 2025-2026.

The Town responds to an ever-increasing number of requests for service from our residents and taxpayers. Parks and Recreation, Senior Center, Youth Family and Human Services, the Police and Fire Departments, continue to meet this challenge. Fifty-five plus communities, affordable housing initiatives, the presence of the correctional facility in East Lyme, all add to the demand. It is incumbent on the Town to meet these needs. Finding efficiencies is the key to maintaining great service and control costs to taxpayers.

One of the main themes developed last budget cycle and continued throughout this proposed budget is to take care of what we already have, before adding new projects and adding to the taxpayers' financial burden. The Town's largest and most important investment, of course, are the employees of our town who provide the services we value so highly. A positive work environment and supportive culture for our employees is essential and central to maintaining efficiency and the quality of life we all enjoy in East Lyme. Consequently, most of our budget goes to labor and the benefits that are provided to our workforce. In addition, East Lyme must continuously invest in maintaining our buildings and replacing outdated, expired equipment, along with maintenance of our roads. These initiatives are consistent with fiscal responsibility and reliable infrastructure.

## **East Lyme Fire Service**

With the continued growth of the Town over the years, the need for full-time firefighters has increased. The East Lyme Fire Service now has eleven full-time firefighters, and this budget anticipates adding

an additional firefighter this year so that we have twelve full-time firefighters. We are now staffing four full-time firefighters per shift 24/7 which requires twelve firefighters for efficient scheduling. The creation of the East Lyme Fire Service has allowed proper management of expenses and oversight of the fire service. This long overdue and complex transition was consistent with the fire service study initiated and requested by East Lyme in 2016. Also, East Lyme negotiated and executed an overdue, new contract with the firefighter's union, Local 3377, IAFF, AFL-CIO. In addition, a new agreement with the East Lyme Ambulance Fund was negotiated and executed which ends the reliance on East Lyme firefighters to staff ambulances, allowing firefighters to be at the ready to fight fires, and a fully staffed ambulance crew to provide emergency medical services. The execution of both the IAFF contract and ELAF agreement have paved the way for greater safety and efficiency in the long term as we move forward.

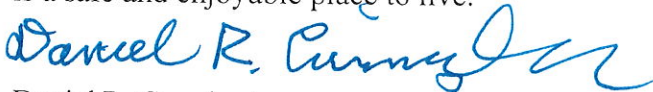
### **Youth Family and Human Services Commission**

The value to the community of the Youth Family and Human Services Commission cannot be overstated. The importance of emotional and psychological wellbeing in our community was the impetus for its creation. The demand for these services continues to grow. It is an important resource and one more layer of protection and care for our residents.

### **Conclusion**

The Board of Selectmen has a great duty to the residents and taxpayers in the preparation of the town budget. It is one of its most important tasks. It is a shared responsibility with the Board of Finance and the Board of Education, which represents approximately two thirds of the annual budget. We work together to create a viable budget that balances the needs of the community with the ability of the taxpayers to sustain these needs. Long term, strategic planning and policies are the best way to accomplish this balance and increase East Lymes' financial stability. Last year, the town established a Coastal Resiliency Fund to anticipate future climatic events affecting our town. I believe the brush fires we experienced is one example of this risk. Hardening our information technology and cyber security is another. These initiatives help to make East Lyme a better risk when we seek bonding to finance debt in the future. In addition, this past year the town formed a Capital Improvement Program Committee to extend strategic planning to capital spending allocations. In this way, a laser focus was directed at capital considerations. The thoughtful and insightful discussions and field trips to our various facilities informed the members of the committee to help guide them in these key decisions.

I welcome and encourage the Board of Selectmen's input as we move forward with the budget process. Thank you to our dedicated Department Heads and commissions who cooperated and acted in good faith in trimming expenses while still finding a way to maintain the excellent services we have enjoyed over the years. Their best efforts are essential in achieving a manageable budget. They, and employees at all levels, who provide outstanding service, are the backbone of our community and ensure that the Town is a safe and enjoyable place to live.



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