

BOF March 17th, 2025 Special
Meeting Minutes

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Minutes of Board of Finance March 17th, 2025, Special Meeting - 03/17/25

Date and time: 03/17/25 5:30 PM to: 03/17/25 7:17 PM

Present: Brooke Stevens, Rec Secretary (* Ms. Stevens was not in attendance), Paul Maxfield, John T. Birmingham, Richard Steel, Scott McAllister, Lauren McNamara, Denise Hall, Chairperson

CC: Dan Cunningham, First Selectman, Joe Bragaw, Director of Public Works, Lisa Timothy, Director of the EL Public Library, Justin Porter, Highway Superintendent, Alex Klose, Deputy Director of Public Works, Ron Bence, Facilities Supervisor, Kristen Caramanica, Senior Center Director, Absent:, Kevin Gervais, Finance Director

Location: East Lyme Town Hall, Upper Conf. Room, 108 Pennsylvania Avenue
Niantic, CT, 06357.

Link: <https://app.meetingking.com/meetings/424077>

Topics

1. Call Meeting to Order & Pledge

Note Chair Hall called the March 17th, 2025, Special Meeting of the Board of Finance to order at 5:30 p.m. and led them in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Note Ms. Hall stated that she wants to remind everyone that at the end of their process, there will be deliberations, and the Board of Finance will propose a budget. There will be a public hearing on the budget, and this will be followed by a referendum.

She emphasized that they are at the beginning of negotiations and highlighted this point because she received several alarming emails regarding the original proposed tax increase that was forwarded to them by the Board of Selectmen. Ms. Hall wants to make sure that people understand they have time to work through and fine tune things.

2. Delegations

Note There was none.

3. Additions to the Agenda

Note There were none.

4. New Business- Budget Reviews

4-1. Building Department

Note see attachment.

 [1054151 - Building Dept - FY2026 BOS Approved.pdf](#)

Note The Board briefly reviewed the Building Department budget and noted some of the following:
The 2025 amended budget was \$329,780.

The Department Head requested a 2026 budget of \$344,922.

After the Board of Selectmen met, it was reduced to \$334,922, an increase of 1.56%.

4-2. East Lyme Public Library

Note see attachment.

 [1054501 - Library Operating Grant - FY2026 BOS Approved.pdf](#)

Note Lisa Timothy, Director of the Public Library, came forward to present her budget and shared some of the following key points:

Current revenue issue despite no increase in spending; previous carryforwards were used but will not be available this year.

Unique financial structure- Health insurance and pension are processed through the town but managed separately as a 501C(3).

Pension and health insurance costs causing budget fluctuations.

Mr. Gervais provides her with the figures for health insurance and the pension, which she includes in the budget.

They send her a check for it which she returns to the town during the year.

Typically, there is a small cushion to prevent running out of funds.

This has been the case for the past few years.

In June Mr. Gervais discovered that our health insurance would increase \$22,000 and our pension \$3,000, resulting in them operating on \$2000, less than they had last year.

They also must cover the costs of supplies, staff raises, and expenses.

It has been an extremely tight year for the library.

She has reduced the ordering of some nonfiction books and e-books to ensure stability through the end of the year.

Reduction in full-time staffing replaced by part-time positions in preceding years now reaching capacity.

Requesting a 9.16% increase due to revenue challenges despite no corresponding rise in expenditures.

For next year, looking for an increase of \$25,000 on 1.2 million.

The problem is the lack of carryforward.

They're not adding any services, they can't, since they're out of space.

There has been a notable increase in children's programs and door counts.

They're summer kids programs last year doubled from the previous year.

She's also held off on purchasing e-books.

It costs a library \$100 to purchase an e-book lease for 26 rentals.

She hasn't been spending the \$6,000 set aside for e-books in order to help with some of their health insurance expense issues.

They're also working with the State Legislature to pass laws to standardize pricing across publishers who sell e-books in Connecticut.

They received a gift of \$80,000 in 2024 which they put into CDs, and they receive an extra \$4,000 to \$5,000 a year from that.

Doing everything, they can be fiscally responsible.

Note Ms. Hall recapped for those following along:

The 2025 amended budget was \$1,231,806.

For 2026 the Board of Selectmen proposed \$1,320,000; a 7.16% increase.

Note Ms. Hall asked about the private foundation and the size of the endowment. Ms. Timothy shared that it usually hovers above a million, but with the stock market being what it is, it's probably well below that right now. She added that it's money that has been donated over 80 years and some of it has been set aside strictly for books, and some for big ticket items, and is in a completely separate legal trust; 5% is given to them each year and this funds their book budget.

Note Ms. Hall stated that as they speak with each department, they are attempting to identify either alternative sources or ways to reduce expenses.

Ms. Timothy responded with the following remarks:

They have never utilized that endowment, it's what distinguishes our library from others.

In years when the budget referendum has not passed and they have had to wait a few months, they were able to continue acquiring books for the library because of that endowment.

She suspects that given this year's budget situation we may face similar circumstances. Therefore, she would prefer to reserve that money for books.

The legacy of conservative financial management has resulted in a well-funded library, and she does not want to jeopardize that by depleting the foundation's resources.

She recognizes that it is a challenging budget year.

She is a taxpayer and understands the situation.

She has children the school system.

They will manage with the resources available.

She acknowledges that there are more pressing issues this year, but she is strongly opposed tapping into the endowment.

She would rather further reduce book acquisitions and operating hours than use the endowment.

Ultimately, the decision is not hers to make; it rests with the foundation.

Note Ms. Timothy and the Board further discussed e-books and how she's using data analytics to focus on the most popular genres and utilizing consortium resources to supplement their collection, given the astronomical cost of leasing e-books.

Note The Board inquired about the inventory of the library and Ms. Timothy explained pre-covid 8% to 10% of their circulation was electronic, 90% was physical, and that's inching up closer to 20% now. It also varies a lot by format. 80% of their audio books are e-books and are downloadable.

4-3. Building Maintenance

Note see attachment.

 [1054325 - Building Maintenance - FY2026 BOS Approved.pdf](#)

Note Joe Bragaw, Director of Public Works came forward to discuss Building Maintenance, Public Works, and Engineering. He introduced Ron Bence, Facility Supervisor, Alex Klose, Deputy Public Works Director, and Justin Porter, Highway Superintendent.

Note Mr. Bragaw highlighted some of the following key points:

Budget Overview-

Total increase- \$118,300 (13.9%)

Utilities increase- \$98,300

Other budget items increase- \$20,050 (2.36%)

1. Custodians line-item increase

*Assistant building supervisor hours increased from 30 to 40 hours; handles facility tasks, particularly in the Community Center & Provides in-house painting, carpentry, and other services as needed.

2. Overtime budget

*Approximately 80% allocated for weekend coverage at the Community Center; Schedule consists of 8 hours on Saturdays and 4 hours on Sundays (when library is open). Duties include building opening, bathroom cleaning, and general presence.

3. Contracted Services

*Service contracts proposed increase- \$3,700

Includes HVAC and elevator contracts; Preventive maintenance to avoid failures.

4. Building Maintenance

*Slight increase in budget.

Covers various maintenance needs, Paint, carpentry, counters, etc.

Applies to town hall, Community Center, Police Station, and other buildings.

5. Operating Expenses

*No changes reported.

4-4. Public Works/Engineering & Highway

Note see attachment.

 [1054303 - Highway Engineering - FY2026 BOS Approved.pdf](#)

Note Mr. Bragaw highlighted some of the following key points which he discussed with the Board:

Highway and Sanitation (Dept. 317) and Engineering (Dept. 105) have been blended together this year.

1. Electric costs and challenges-

*Significant increase in costs due to public demand charge.

Town is hit "ten times as hard" compared to individual households.

Recent meeting with Eversource representative but uncertainty about the future of the public demand charge.

Charge might sunset, but a new charge may be introduced.

Planning a deep dive into bills to understand the situation.

Current budget estimate: \$94,000 (based on current tracking.)

Supply rate increased from 6.7 to 10.2 (started January 1st.)

Impact on budget still being assessed.

2. Heating Oil and Propane-

*Town attempts to bid out for cost-effective billing.

Increased costs due to colder winter.

Budget based on estimated fuel needs and rising costs.

3. Water and Sewer-

*Rates are increasing.

Affects various town buildings (e.g., town hall, field service building and so forth.)

4. ADA Compliance Work at Town Hall-

*Installing a lift, not a full enclosed elevator; Open shaft with rails.

No immediate impact on the coming budget for service contracts.

5. Public Demand Charge Issue-

*Affecting both individuals and the town.

Created by the State, collected by Eversource; Covers unpaid bills during COVID & funds building charging stations for electric vehicles.

Public outcry due to bill increases.

State legislature examining potential solutions.

*Future of the Charge- expected change on April 1st.

Current public benefit charge may be replaced, uncertainty about the new charge and its percentage so caution needed in budget adjustments.

Affects multiple departments (Water & Sewer, Board of Education, etc.)

Total electricity costs for the town exceed \$1 million, an unfunded mandate.

6. Budget Structure-

*Highway and Engineering budgets combined allows for easy year-to-year comparison and full transparency.

Proposed budget increase already cut by \$133,000 (80% of initial proposal.)

Current operating expense increase= \$1.138 million.

Revenue increase proposal= \$106,000 (12.6% increase)

Net budget impact= 1.6% decrease in overall town budget.

Revenue Sources are commercial trash charges and Transfer station fees.

Total budget= Approximately \$4 million.

Current overage= \$49,841; major categories include streetlights, road work, and personnel.

*Personnel costs cover various essential services such as road plowing & sweeping, drainage repairs, garbage collection, and Transfer station operations.

7. Engineering-

*In-house engineering staff saves on outsourcing costs; Town Hall ADA compliance project (estimated savings: \$60,000 – \$80,000.)

*Current projects total approximately \$19 million; East Pattagansett reconstruction, Colony Road Bridge, Fairhaven, Plants Dam rebuilding.

8. Budget changes/challenges-

*Overtime budget; regular and storm overtime combined into one line item.

Increased usage this year compared to previous years.

*Stormwater management; Line item transferred from Engineering budget.

Increased costs due to DEEP permit compliance requirements.

*Tree work; no budget increase despite growing needs.

Focuses on tree removal and canopy lifting.

Current budget insufficient for 118 miles of roads.

9. Waste Management-

*Contracted operations for waste and recycling up 8.64%.

SCRRA membership benefits include lower disposal costs (67/ton vs. market rate of 120/ton) and free recycling (saves approximately \$200,000 annually.)

*Current favorable contract ends in 2030.

They're planning gradual rate increases to prepare for market rates.

Note Ms. Hall asked about comparing municipal waste management vs. commercial vendor contracts and Mr. Bragaw discussed how outsourcing would be significantly more costly. Ms. Hall said she would still like to see that data provided. She added that exploring this type of waste collection services offers potential benefits such as selling town-owned trucks and transferring employees to a contractor.

Note Mr. Bragaw said when looked at outsourcing some time back, it was estimated to cost \$200,000 more than their current operations, and the primary problem is the limited competition- the one vendor willing to provide service here is CWPM, which could lead to even higher costs.

Note Mr. Bragaw shared that the most cost-saving measure would be a subscription-based service, a Pay-as-you-throw system for trash pickup. He added that they've relocated administrative staff to the Field Service Building for better communication.

Note Mr. Bragaw further discussed the following budget items:

10. Road Projects and Maintenance-

*The annual budget for road maintenance was \$850,000 and reduced to \$750,000 this year.

They received an additional \$316,487 from A Town Aid Road grant.

Upcoming focus areas include Route 161, Spring Rock Road, Drabik Road, Beach areas (Crescent Beach, Giants Neck Heights, Giants Neck Beach, Black Point.)

The budget for this has remained static for 11 years, and many beach area roads are 40-50 years old and need treatment.

Note Mr. Steel asked if the road project priority list could be provided to the Board.

Note Ms. Hall said was a little bit surprised to learn at a CIP meeting that they plow all the sidewalks in front of residences as well as businesses on. She asked what percentage of the sidewalks are, town-owned property versus private-owned property?

Mr. Bragaw replied 5-7% of resident sidewalks are plowed and 90-95% of towns require residents to clear their own sidewalks, but it would be a very unpopular ordinance to propose.

Ms. Hall said despite being an unpopular idea, ceasing this practice could provide a cost savings in a tight budget year. Mr. Bragaw felt that it would only result in a savings of around \$10,000 annually and again emphasized that it would be more beneficial to reinstitute the pay as throw program, which might yield \$300,000 to \$400,000.

Note Mr. Bragaw further detailed the significant burden on town workers during snowstorms:

Plowing can last 25-30 hours during storms.

Additional 18 miles of sidewalk to clear after road plowing.

Delays in sidewalk clearing due to worker rest needs.

Workers finishing at 2 AM, returning next day.

Complaints about uncleared sidewalks while workers' rest.

The main cost is overtime for workers.

Prioritization of sidewalk clearing is Downtown areas and near schools, followed by areas branching off from high-priority zones and extra sidewalks in residential neighborhoods.

New sidewalks are being added at Exit 74.

Note Ms. Hall and the Board discussed how they'd like to see him analyze and present specific costs associated with sidewalk plowing.

Note The Board and Mr. Bragaw further discussed the budget.

Note Justin Porter, Highway Superintendent, shared the following:

He is responsible for overseeing all operations.

He and Mr. Bragaw have spent considerable time reviewing everything and identifying cost-cutting measures to maintain the highest level of service for residents and taxpayers possible. Regarding the trash, if that decision is made, the cost to revert back would be between 8 and 10 million dollars, which is not to be taken lightly.

Once this decision is made, it would be almost irreversible.

He wants to ensure that everyone understands the repercussions if this route is chosen.

They have met with the owners of CWPM and discussed the viability of this option.

No proposal has been presented that would save the town any money.

Mr. Bragaw will provide all the information, but he wants to make it clear that they have done their diligence.

He advises against pursuing this option.

Note Mr. Bragaw briefly detailed the streetlight budget and previous LED conversion with the Board.

Note Alex Klose, Deputy Public Works Director, came forward and discussed road, pavement, and drainage maintenance. He explained that the maintenance budget also includes infrastructure upgrades for drainage, and that issues include sinkholes, heaving, cracking, and rotting of corrugated metal piping. A big drainage project can easily cost upwards of \$100,000 and planning adapts year-to-year depending on emergency repairs, heavy storm damage, and road washouts.

4-5. Commission on Aging

Note see attachment.

 [1054417 - Commission on Aging - FY2026 BOS Approved.pdf](#)

Note Kristen Caramanica, Director of the Senior Center, came forward and shared the following in regard to her proposed budget:

By 2030, all baby boomers will be 65+; extensive increase in elderly population expected.

The Senior Center budget remains largely unchanged despite anticipated increased demand.

They currently operate with volunteer support in multiple roles (event assistance, kitchen support, etc.).

She's requesting an increase to 71.5 hours of driving time for her Senior Center Bus Drivers.

The proposed salary increase is \$21.75 per hour.

An estimated additional cost of approximately \$80,301.

Transportation services provide benefits such as reducing isolation and improving access to medical and social services.

Transportation Statistics for 2024= 145 clients served, 32,141 total miles, 2,678 miles per month, 2,986 total riders, 400 monthly riders.

The Bus Fleet-

2017 bus has 93,287 miles (not in great shape, rusting.)

2021 bus had 157 miles when budget was planned (currently has more.)

New bus expected in July.

Useful life of buses=150,000 miles.

Future capital project-

*CT DOT bus grant covering 80% of federal share with remaining local match targeted at \$35,000 for supplementary needs.

10-Year Projection Goals-

Renovate Senior Center facility.

Dedicated health service area.

New furniture.

Increase number of attendees.

Improve transportation (aim for no 24-hour notice requirement), expand to evenings and weekends.

Enhance marketing and community awareness.

Consider rebranding (possibly changing name from "Senior Center.")

Current Operations-

*60 volunteers at the Senior Center and roles include Meals on Wheels, Teaching (drawing, guitar jam), Kitchen staff, Event assistance.

*Social Worker Position moving from Senior Center to Youth and Family and Human Services. Previously 37.5 hours funded by ARPA money for two years; position currently vacant.

*Removal of full-time bus driver position; utilizing part-time drivers for flexibility.

Current Space Constraints-

Senior Center experiencing room shortages; programs being turned away due to lack of space.

Applied for AARP grant to address space issues.

Room divider for multipurpose dining room.

New, easily movable furniture.

Grant request for \$25,000(up from \$5,000 from last year.)

May need to use special revenue funds for remaining costs.

Note Ms. McNamara thanked Ms. Caramanica for all of her efforts and inquired if they hold any annual fundraising drives. Ms. Caramanica replied that they're always happy to accept donations.

Note Mr. Maxfield asked when they anticipate obtaining the new bus and Ms. Caramanica said it's due to arrive in July. She briefly discussed the wear and tear on the buses due to salt and not being covered when not in use.

Ms. Hall noted that the Capital Improvement Committee has been looking at a better way to store our equipment for easier access and longer lifespans.

4-6. Capital Projects

Note Ms. Hall said this material was not provided so they will table this item until their next meeting.

5. Public Discussion

Note There was none.

6. Board Comments

Note There was none.

7. Adjournment

Decision MOTION (1)

Mr. Maxfield moved to adjourn the BOF March 17th, 2025, Special Meeting at 7:17 p.m.

Mr. Birmingham seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 6-0-0.

Note Respectfully Submitted,
Brooke Stevens, Recording Secretary