

Minutes of Board of Finance April 28th, 2025, Public Hearing - 04/28/25

Date and time: 04/28/25 7:00 PM to: 04/28/25 10:32 PM

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

CC: Dan Cunningham, First Selectman, Kevin Gervais, Finance Director

Location: East Lyme Town High School Auditorium, 30 Chesterfield Road
East Lyme, CT, 06333.

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Topics

1. Call Meeting to Order & Pledge

Note Chair Hall called the April 28th, 2025, Public Hearing of the Board of Finance to order at 7:02 p.m. and led those assembled in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Note Ms. Hall requested a moment of silence to honor Larry Roberts, a recently deceased former principal of East Lyme High School, who was reportedly well-regarded by students and faculty.

2. Comments by First Selectman

Note First Selectman Dan Cunningham provided an overview of the town's budget process, starting with Department Head requests, followed by reviews and reductions by the First Selectman, the Board of Selectmen, and finally the Board of Finance.

Note The resulting proposed budget is \$96,21,396, a 5.6% increase from the previous year. He highlighted strategic planning initiatives like the Capital Improvement Committee tour, the addition of a 12th Firefighter with a future goal of 18, renegotiated contracts for Fire and Ambulance services, a request for a rescue boat, enhanced community services (Fair Rent Commission, Senior Bus, Youth and Family Services), increased focus on cyber security and communications infrastructure, and the establishment of a coastal resiliency fund.

Note The budget increase is attributed to rising health insurance and electric costs, increased pension contributions, higher software expenses, and inflationary pressures.

3. Comments by Board of Superintendent Newton

Note Superintendent Jeff Newton presented the Board of Education's budget, which started with an initial request reflecting an 8.26% increase, then was reduced to 6.99% and adopted by the Board of Education at 6.72%. Due to Board of Finance reductions, the proposed education budget now stands at a 4.22% increase, a reduction of \$1.35 million.

Note This cut will impact instructional resources, supplies, professional development, enrichment, field trips, program services, equipment, and staffing. Proposed staffing reductions include 7.0 FTE at the high school, 3.0 at the elementary level, 9 Paraeducator positions, an elementary library Secretary, and reduced hours for some Secretaries.

Note Key cost drivers include salaries and benefits (over \$3 million rollover), tuition (\$557,530), and transportation (\$366,800). Mr. Newton emphasized that 97% of their budget consists of fixed costs driven by contracts, leaving limited flexibility for further reductions.

4. Board of Finance Presentation of Proposed FY2025-26 Budget

Note see attachment.

 [Board of Finance Public Hearing 04-28-2025.pptx](#)

Note Chair Hall introduced the Board of Finance members, and thanked attendees, the Board of Education, and Kevin Gervais, the town Finance Director, for their work on the budget.

Note She outlined the Board of Finance's process, which included eight meetings with Department Heads and the Board of Education after the Board of Selectmen and Board of Education completed their reviews.

Note The Board of Finance is proposing a \$2,196,000 increase for the town operations budget and a \$2.5 million increase for the Board of Education budget.

Note Following this meeting, the Board of Finance will formalize the final budget, which will then go to a town meeting on May 12th before proceeding to a referendum for eligible voters.

Note Ms. Hall explained the role of the Board of Finance to the students present. She clarified that while the Board of Selectmen are the policy makers (like a corporate board) and the Board of Education makes policy decisions for schools, the Board of Finance is responsible for determining how to pay for the proposed budgets, considering the town's affordability, the impact on residents and the mill rate, and the method of payment (operational budget vs. long-term bonds).

Note She emphasized the Board's commitment to fiscal responsibility to benefit taxpayers (including retirees on fixed incomes) and improve the town's credit rating, which leads to lower borrowing costs. Initiatives supporting this goal include establishing a coastal resiliency fund (important to credit agencies) and an OPED trust to pre-fund retiree health benefits.

Note The Board also aims to reduce bonded debt by building a cash capital account for expenses like road paving and maintain a healthy undesignated fund balance (rainy day fund) of 17% of the general fund. Finally, they are exploring ways to increase revenue through service charges (like Fire Marshal inspections), building permit fee adjustments, and actively managing investment income from tax payments.

Note Ms. Hall discussed the town's financial challenges, emphasizing the need to reduce outstanding debt to lower interest payments. Pension funding is another key concern, with required contributions projected to increase significantly in the coming years, prompting consideration of defined contribution programs as a potentially cost-effective alternative to traditional defined benefit pensions.

Note She also highlighted the issue of underfunded state grants, particularly the PILOT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes) grant for state-owned properties in East Lyme. The state currently reimburses the town significantly less than the estimated \$3.8 million in potential property taxes these properties (York Correctional Center, Camp Nett, Rocky Neck State Park) would generate if privately owned.

Note Full funding of the PILOT grant could reduce the potential mill rate increase by 1.7.

Note She mentioned that underfunded ECS grants (education cost sharing) and excess cost funding for education are additional areas requiring advocacy with state legislators to alleviate the burden on local property taxes. Ms. Hall noted that Connecticut has the third highest property taxes in the nation.

Note She explained that unexpected legal fees have also presented a budget challenge this year, and in terms of the town's fiscal health, while the fund balance was 21% as of June 30, 2024 (above their 17% target), it's projected to decrease to 18.9% this year and potentially fall below the target in the following year. The bonding request for the current year is \$6.5 million, and the town's total debt stands at \$82.5 million (excluding water and sewer debt), which is used to fund aging infrastructure. Ms. Hall noted the collaborative work of the CIP (Capital Improvement Plan) committee in finding efficient solutions for town and Board of Education needs, such as optimizing the parking of trucks and equipment.

Note A significant item initially in the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) was a nearly \$19 million new building project for the Senior Center, Library, and Youth Center. The CIP Committee decided that such a large project should go to a town referendum for voter approval rather than being solely decided by the Board. Additionally, First Selectman Dan Cunningham has been in contact with state legislators to explore potential state funding opportunities for this project. This project will be reflected in the two- or three-year CIP, indicating its continued importance, especially if state funding can be secured.

Note Ms. Hall explained that while the Board of Ed requested a larger increase, the Board of Finance ultimately proposed a \$2.5 million increase after identifying potential savings. She emphasized that they cannot dictate how the Board of Ed spends its money but can focus on scrutinizing the budget for possible efficiencies.

Note During their review, the Board of Finance examined high school class sizes, noting averages of around 14-15 students in core subjects and 10 in AP classes. They compared these to surrounding towns where class sizes are typically between 20-22 students, suggesting potential savings if East Lyme's class sizes were more comparable.

Note They also analyzed the change in student population versus staffing levels. At the high school, the student population decreased by 135 students over the past five years, while staffing increased by one. The Board of Finance pointed out that a proportionate decrease in staff would have suggested approximately 14 fewer staff members, indicating that other districts more actively manage the student-to-staff ratio.

Note Ms. Hall acknowledged the district's priority of avoiding job losses but emphasized the need for fiscal responsibility impacting the entire town.

Note The BOF noted the addition of 15 teacher coach positions during the COVID years, funded by temporary grants. They consistently stressed that these positions should be eliminated once the grant funding ceased.

Note While recognizing the Board of Education's prerogative to retain successful programs, the BOF expects them to find alternative funding sources to offset these costs when the grant money is no longer available, rather than simply allowing expenses to continually increase. Currently, seven of those initially grant-funded positions remain on staff.

Note Ms. Hall detailed how the BOF conducted a line-by-line review of the Board of Education's budget. They observed a significant increase in the professional development budget, which was partly attributed to the ending of the grant funding that previously covered those expenses. She cited Daniel Hand High School in Madison, noting that as their student enrollment has declined over the years, they have also reduced their full-time equivalent (FTE) staff, demonstrating an active management of the student-to-staff ratio, a practice observed in other districts as well.

Note She added that they inquired about metrics indicating student performance in East Lyme. An accountability index from the Connecticut Department of Education, measuring test scores and other factors, showed East Lyme in a quadrant with high student outcomes but also high per-pupil expenditures (\$23,245). Comparing this to Rocky Hill, which achieves similar high outcomes at a lower per-pupil cost (roughly \$20,000), the BOF illustrated a potential saving of \$2.5 million at the high school (with approximately 890 students) if the per-pupil cost could be reduced by \$2,000.

Note She acknowledged the positive impact of a strong school system on home values, a point the BOF understands. However, the comparison with Rocky Hill suggests that higher spending doesn't automatically equate to better results.

They credit the invested families in East Lyme as a significant factor in the schools' success and applaud the students and families present for their engagement. The Board recognizes the difficulty of balancing the needs of the school system with the financial concerns of all East Lyme residents and aiming for a budget that might not fully satisfy everyone but represents a responsible compromise.

Note Ms. Hall said they inquired about the projected budget for the following year if all current expenses simply rolled over, noting that such a budget would be even larger and that consistent 6-7% annual increases are unsustainable for the town.

This suggests a need to consider different and potentially more drastic approaches to budgeting and operations. While acknowledging the difficulty of potential staff reductions, the Board reiterated that it's the Board of Education's responsibility to determine how to manage their budget within the allocated increase (\$2.5 million), as the Board of Finance does not specify which positions to cut. She emphasized their role in determining what level of increase the town can afford.

Note Ms. Hall shared that the proposed town revenues for the year will primarily come from taxes, with other sources including licenses, charges for services, and investment earnings, totaling a 6.19% increase. The proposed expenditures across general government, public safety, and public works also reflect a 6.19% increase.

Note This budget is projected to result in a 1.55 mill increase in the mill rate, which translates to a 5.88% increase in taxes. The impact on individual property taxes will vary based on the property's assessed value (70% of market value), with a typical \$350,000 - \$400,000 East Lyme property potentially seeing an annual increase of around \$400, while higher-value commercial properties would experience larger increases.

Note Ms. Hall highlighted the valuable process of visiting various town sites, which will continue. The capital project summary for the current year (one-year CIP) includes approximately \$7.5 million for items like vehicles and public works equipment. The ten-year CIP outlines a total of \$109 million for various identified projects. All information discussed, including meeting recordings, is available on the town website under the Board of Finance section.

Note Despite the importance of the budget process, Ms. Hall observed that the Board of Finance meetings had low attendance. She encourages public input and welcomes residents to attend their monthly meetings to discuss any relevant topics on their agenda.

5. Public Discussion - Comments from Public

Note Ms. Hall said the next step in the meeting is to open the floor for public comment. They will begin by calling on individuals eligible to vote on the budget, emphasizing the importance of hearing their feedback. If time allows, they will then proceed to hear comments from students who are not eligible to vote. When called, speakers are asked to come to one of the two microphones, state their name and address, and limit their comments to two minutes to ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak before the meeting adjourns for the Board of Finance's own meeting.

5-1. Lucy Schuman of 18 North Pine Street

Note Schuman shared that she's a former East Lyme Assistant Principal and thanked the Board for their service. She pointed out Connecticut's high-income disparity and the increasing need for food assistance within the town, urging the Board of Finance to consider this data.

In terms of the proposed Board of Education reductions, she questioned the implied average salary of \$90,000+ if 10 positions were cut, suggesting that layoffs would likely affect lower-salaried staff.

She's passionate about the schools after a long career in the system and believes the town gets good value but stressed the need for accurate data to inform decisions.

5-2. Jackie Menzella of 11 Spring Street

Note Ms. Menzella, a teacher at East Lyme Middle School, thanked the Board for their work. She shared positive news about a fifth-grade student in her after-school writing club who won a writing competition, highlighting the importance of classroom learning and extracurricular activities.

Note She expressed concern about potential cuts to middle school after-school clubs, as these provide a sense of belonging for students with fewer school connections, citing examples like the writers' club, science club, and math club, which participate in competitions, and even a Minecraft club.

Note Ms. Menzella noted that athletics were not among the proposed cuts and, while acknowledging a bias as a language arts teacher, pointed out the significant costs associated with athletics (Director, Secretary, Assistant Director, Coaches, Custodians, Security, buses). She argued that participation in sports involves tryouts and creates "haves" and "have-nots."

Note She urged the Board to support academic after-school programs and suggested that if cuts are necessary, they should be applied across the board, as classroom funding is the priority. She expressed concern about a perceived bias against academic clubs compared to athletics.

5-3. Pat Hesney, President of the Board of Ed Secretarial Union

Note Ms. Hesney spoke against the proposed budget reductions leading to staff eliminations and reductions, emphasizing the harm to East Lyme students.

Note She argued that all staff reductions, including teachers, paraprofessionals, the elementary library aid, and the reduction of 12-month secretaries to 10 months, negatively impact student learning by increasing class sizes and reducing student support.

Note She detailed the crucial roles of elementary library assistants beyond shelving books, such as curriculum preparation, book mending, and retrieving missing books.

Ms. Hesney also highlighted the negative consequences of reducing 12-month administrative assistants to 10 months, leaving no office staff in some elementary schools during the summer, which would affect new student registration, teacher supply delivery, and support for summer school and Parks and Recreation programs.

Note Although not a resident of East Lyme, she urged the Board of Finance to support the Superintendent, Board of Ed, students, families, and staff by reinstating funds to the proposed budget, emphasizing the need for community support in raising students.

5-4. Elizabeth Dowd of 66 East Pattagansett

Note Ms. Dowd thanked the Board of Finance for their efforts and identified herself as one of the few attendees at their budget meetings, promising to attend more Board of Finance and Board of Education meetings.

Note She emphasized the hard work of the Board of Ed, Superintendent Jeff Newton, Department Heads, Principals, and Teachers in developing a reasonable budget under various constraints like rising healthcare and transportation costs.

Note She implored the Board of Finance to restore the \$1.5 million cut to the Board of Education's budget on behalf of the children who will lose programs and needed services (including those remaining from COVID funding), STEM classes, after-school clubs, and library services. Ms. Dowd argued that these services help reduce disparities caused by income inequality and urged the Board to let the voters decide by restoring the funding.

5-5. Amy Farior of 91 Holmes Road

Note Ms. Farior said she's a parent in the district and an educator in a neighboring community and thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak.

Note She emphasized the real impact of budget cuts on children, stating that proposed reductions to school-level supports are foundational, not extras, for a safe and effective learning environment.

Note She highlighted the potential loss of positions:
Seven at the high school, three at the elementary level (including a second-grade teacher at Flanders, leading to class sizes of 20-22), four paraeducators, two flexible substitute roles, one library secretary, and three additional secretary positions.

Note Ms. Farior stressed that students' needs are increasing, not decreasing.

Note She also expressed concern over cuts to extracurricular opportunities, which allow non-athletic and non-scholar students to shine and develop leadership skills.

Note She noted the united opposition of the Board of Education, School Administration, and Teachers to these cuts, emphasizing the seriousness of the situation and that this is a shared concern about the damage these reductions will cause, not just a disagreement over priorities.

5-6. Genevieve Passutto of 250 Upper Pattagansett Road

Note Ms. Passutto said she's the Vice President of the Secretarial Union and requested reconsideration of the proposed reductions to the Board of Education budget.

Note She argued that these cuts will reduce staff, harm student learning, and decrease staff morale. Specifically, within her union, the elementary Library Aid position would be eliminated, and three 12-month Administrative Assistant positions would be reduced to 10 months, leaving two elementary schools without office staff during the summer.

Note Ms. Passutto stated that these reductions will negatively impact student and parent access, delay the availability of school supplies, shift librarians' focus from teaching to shelving, and leave essential administrative tasks unmanaged. She urged the Board to reinstate the Board of Education's budget.

5-7. Geetha Sivanandam of 4 Mallard Circle

Note Ms. Sivanandam said she's the library Secretary whose position is proposed to be eliminated and is speaking both personally and as a concerned mother.

Note She described the library as a crucial safe haven for many students, especially those struggling, providing emotional support and a sense of belonging. She recounted instances where she intervened to calm and redirect upset students, allowing them to return to learning.

Note Beyond emotional support, she detailed her daily tasks of assisting students and staff, cataloging new books, and extensively repairing damaged books (over 900 this year alone in one school), saving the district replacement costs. She argued that without a library Secretary, these small but critical tasks will be neglected.

Note Ms. Sivanandam also expressed concern about the broader proposed cuts, including 10 teachers, four Paraeducators, vital middle school clubs, and Secretaries, as well as reductions in supplies and instructional materials, all of which impact real learning. She highlighted middle school as a particularly critical time for emotional, social, and academic development, and emphasized that clubs are often essential for at-risk students' engagement.

Note As a parent, she worries deeply about the environment these cuts would create.

5-8. Kyle Douton of 5 Rockwell Street

Note Mr. Douton said he's a business owner in town and expressed concerns about the lack of synergy between the Board of Education and the rest of the town government. He cited examples like the Board of Ed taking over field maintenance (previously Parks and Rec) and snow plowing, acquiring their own equipment instead of sharing resources. He argued that the Board of Education operates too independently.

Note Mr. Douton also questioned the comparison to Rocky Hill regarding budget decreases (which he views as a smaller proportional increase for the larger Board of Ed budget) and suggested that lower-cost, high-outcome towns likely receive more outside government funding due to their demographics, unlike East Lyme's peer towns.

Note He further raised concerns about the financial impact of affordable housing developments in town, providing examples of low revenue generated compared to the number of units, suggesting the town should aim for developments similar to Harvest Glen to increase income.

5-9. Ryan Shrader of 15 Applewood Common

Note Mr. Shrader said he's a parent of four children in the schools, President of the new East Lyme Education Foundation, and a former Board of Education member. He stated his strong support for the schools based on firsthand experience of the district's careful financial management.

Note He argued that Superintendent Newton's budget is lean, and any cuts directly impact student services.

Note He pointed out that the Board of Ed requested a 6.99% increase, while the town requested 12%, yet the Board cut significantly more from the schools (\$1.5 million) than the town (\$375,000), effectively having the schools fund extra town services.

Note Mr. Shrader felt that calling the reduction of the increase "not a cut" was disingenuous as it results in a real loss of services.

Note He criticized the Board of Finance's statistics and analysis as potentially cherry-picked and not credible due to the lack of educators on the Board.

Note He believes the budget prioritizes the town at the expense of the schools, sending a negative message to children and the community.

Note Mr. Shrader argued that investing in schools drives property values and the local economy and that underfunding them harms everyone. He urged the Board to reconsider the cuts, as they did in 2019, and restore the necessary funding, allowing voters to decide at referendum.

Note Chair Hall responded to the previous speaker, Mr. Shrader, clarifying that the data presented in the graphics comparing East Lyme to other districts was provided by the Superintendent and represented their DRG (District Reference Group) in the matrix, and was not selectively chosen by the Board of Finance.

5-10. Emily Shrader of 15 Applewood Common

Note Ms. Shrader said she's President of the Lily B. Haynes PTA and mother of four children in the East Lyme school system (with a child in the system for nine years and another graduating in 13), and emphasized her deep investment in the schools' and town's future.

Note She stated that thriving schools are essential for a vibrant community, protecting property values and ensuring a strong future for East Lyme.

Note Addressing the Board of Finance, she acknowledged the difficulty of budget season but argued that cutting the Board of Education's proposed budget by \$1.5 million is fiscal shortsightedness, not responsibility.

Note She highlighted the town's budget being poised for over 10% growth while schools face drastic cuts, resulting in larger class sizes and lost opportunities for children while the town receives new equipment and enhanced services.

Note Ms. Shrader asserted that these cuts are the best of bad options and will be felt by all East Lyme families. In terms of the town's legal fees, children should not suffer for the mistakes of adults. She urged the Board of Finance to do what is right for East Lyme by restoring the education budget and allowing voters to decide at referendum.

5-11. Tim Dowd of 66 East Pattagansett

Note Mr. Dowd said he's a science teacher at the high school and another attendee of the Board of Finance meetings and acknowledged the difficult budget situation in town due to spiraling inflation and unfunded mandates.

Note While understanding the request for the Board of Ed to identify \$1.5 million in cuts, he highlighted the devastating impact on the science department, including the potential loss of flagship classes like biotech and marine biology, which students plan their high school careers around and provide a competitive edge.

Note He expressed concern about future staffing stability, noting that facing major pink slips for the second time in three years could deter people from working in the district, creating a false sense of security for new hires.

Note: Mr. Dowd also emphasized the rising need for student mental health support and the negative impact of cutting paraeducators and potentially increasing counselor ratios, which would detract from college counseling duties to address immediate crises. He questioned the logic of cutting staff only to potentially rehire in a few years, wondering who would be available.

Note: In terms of the accountability index graph showing East Lyme with high outcomes and high cost, he stated his pride in the district's good work and worried that drastic cuts would lead to a decline in quality, referencing New Milford as a less desirable comparison than Rocky Hill. As a parent of two young children, he wants them to have the same good opportunities that current students have.

5-12. Lynn Sullivan of 85 East Pattagansett Road

Note: Ms. Sullivan stated that East Lyme teachers have consistently made sacrifices to cut costs and that a further \$1.5 million cut in personnel would be devastating.

Note: She shared her experience as a half-time Special Education Teacher with a full-time caseload, done out of care for students, and mentioned teachers' efforts to save money on supplies. She argued that while material sacrifices can be made, reducing human resources has a significant cost, pointing out that the district has lost excellent staff, including an expert in complex IEPs, to full-time positions elsewhere due to less than full-time offerings in East Lyme.

Note: Ms. Sullivan asserted that monetary decisions in education result in human tolls, affecting the most vulnerable children. She emphasized that teachers are driven by a deep care for children and a desire to make a difference, and not by financial gain.

Note: She believes that cutting school funding sends a message that the community does not care about children or invest in the future.

Note: While acknowledging the Board of Finance's difficult position, she implored them to consider the impact on young children and to prioritize the support needed for them to thrive, urging them to make decisions based on what they know is right.

5-13. Shannon Small of 17 Harvest Glen

Note: Ms. Small said she's a surgeon at Lawrence and Memorial who recently moved to East Lyme from Long Island with her two young children (aged five and six) in December, and that they chose the town specifically for its education system, not for facilities or aesthetics.

Note: She emphasized that they relied on the district to provide a good public education, a sentiment echoed by two of her partners who also live in East Lyme.

Note: She shared that her six-year-old loves Library Day and the library books due to the social interaction and shared enjoyment with friends.

Note: Ms. Small stressed the importance of elementary school, STEM classes, and instilling a love for science, reading, and math for future generations, including potential doctors. She believes the proposed cuts are shortsighted.

Note: As a new but deeply invested resident who bought a home in Harvest Glen with the intention of raising her children and seeing them graduate from East Lyme High School, she implored the Board to reconsider the cuts, given their critical importance.

5-14. Sara Nazzaro of 15 Mayfield Terrace

Note Ms. Nazzaro an alumna from 2000, a teacher at ELHS, and a mother of two, thanked the Board for their work.

Note She shared her family's history of moving to East Lyme specifically for the school system, attributing her personal and professional achievements to the education she received. She noted her mother still lives and pays taxes in town and runs a daycare, and her brother also teaches at ELHS, and emphasized the critical need to invest in young minds and excellent teachers, especially in the current challenging times.

Note Ms. Nazzaro argued that small class sizes are essential, particularly given the significant mental health needs of students, the needs of gifted and talented students, and the ongoing impact of the pandemic. She stated that the presented class size averages are misleading, with many teachers managing large classes (e.g., ACCP averaging 19, AP Lit averaging 22), while smaller classes are necessary to support the neediest students.

Note She highlighted the unseen individual support provided by dedicated teachers over the years as crucial to student success. While acknowledging the potential for teachers to continue achieving goals despite cuts, she warned it would come at the expense of their mental health.

Note As a voter and taxpayer, Ms. Nazzaro expressed willingness to pay more to support healthy, curious children and amazing teachers' mental health, and urged for fewer cuts.

5-15. Jessica Newman of 21 Sapia Drive

Note Ms. Newman, the mother of a second grader with autism at Niantic Center School, spoke about the critical need for education services in the district, which are at risk with the proposed budget cut. She highlighted that many children, including her son, rely on certified teaching staff, paraeducators, and other support staff to develop crucial skills.

Note She emphasized the existing crisis of long waitlists for vital therapies like speech and OT outside the school system, sharing her own daughter's nearly year-long wait for speech therapy before kindergarten. She stressed the importance of early intervention, which school-based services can provide, bridging the gap and giving children the necessary foundation for academic and social success.

Note Ms. Newman urged the Board to prioritize funding that supports all students, especially vulnerable ones and the resources they depend on, arguing that investing in these programs benefits the entire community.

Note She added that schools should be a beacon of hope and opportunity for all students and that enhancing services to address urgent needs will build a more inclusive and supportive environment, starting with the choices made today.

5-16. Kara Kabordi of 51 Lovers Lane

Note Ms. Kabordi said she's a proud East Lyme graduate and parent and thanked the Board and expressed gratitude for the East Lyme educators, past and present, emphasizing their lasting impact. She recalled her kindergarten teacher, Mrs. Jacobson, from 1992, illustrating how every educator matters.

Note While opposing cuts to any educator, she specifically advocated for physical education, highlighting that it teaches lifelong habits for physical and mental well-being, teamwork, resilience, leadership, and self-confidence. In an era of rising youth mental health concerns, obesity, and screen time, PE provides a structured opportunity to address these issues.

Note Ms. Kabordi argued that reducing positions disrupts consistency and relationships, which are crucial for student thriving. She explained that cuts at one school level can have district-wide ripple effects, causing displacement and elimination of part-time positions elsewhere.

Note Investing in PE, she asserted, is investing in the whole child's health and future. She urged the Board to consider what the district stands to lose and what must be protected and emphasized the value of a district that invests in wellness and understands the true purpose of education and thanked them for ensuring all citizens will have a voice through the budget referendum.

5-17. Ashley Walsh of 43 Mostowy Road

Note Ms. Walsh stated that her family moved to East Lyme for the schools after researching and relocated from Rhode Island specifically for these educational opportunities. She thanked Ms. Hall for her letter regarding the PILOT program, agreeing it's a crucial funding area to explore. She also acknowledged that the students who will be impacted by the budget cannot vote.

Note Ms. Walsh noted that while Rocky Hill was on the comparison graph, it's not a top 10 school in Connecticut, and the majority of the top 10 high schools are in Fairfield County, with only one other outside that region besides East Lyme.

Note She stated that as residents of Connecticut, they expect taxes to increase, as low taxes were not the reason for choosing to live in the state.

5-18. Jamie Barr Shelburn of 31 Mcelaney Drive

Note Ms. Barr Shelburn said she's here as a parent and as a member of the Board of Education (which she's been a member of since 2007.)

Note She clarified that Superintendent Jeff Newton and his Administration do not simply roll over the budget each year but build it from zero. She added that the current proposed cut from the Board of Finance is the worst she has ever seen and is detrimental to students, staff, and the town's future.

Note While agreeing with the sentiments expressed by previous speakers, she aims to save time by not reiterating their points.

Note In terms of the comparison to Rocky Hill, she noted their significantly higher mill rate of 35.92 compared to East Lyme's proposed 28.2 and stated her preference for East Lyme's rate.

Note She also explained that Madison's dropping budget, another town mentioned for comparison, is due to closing schools (reducing from seven to four) and students aging out of special education services (which typically increases costs), providing context for their budget decrease.

Note Ms. Hall clarified that she did not state that Superintendent Newton uses a rollover budget. Instead, she explained that she presented what the budget would look like if it were simply rolled over and was not suggesting that this was actually how the budget was created.

5-19. Rebecca Karun of 3 Aberdeen Court

Note: Ms. Karun introduced herself as the wife of a retired Navy veteran who chose to settle in East Lyme after years of moving, specifically because of the school system. While not wanting to repeat previous points, she questioned the evidence, beyond anecdotal claims, that funding the proposed Board of Education budget would significantly compromise the quality of life for anyone in town.

She characterized the responses of "too expensive" or "can't afford" as the words of those unwilling to fund necessary resources. She also thanked everyone present for demonstrating to her children how to mobilize and advocate for important issues.

5-20. Rebecca Igmundson of 13 Brookfield Drive

Note: Ms. Igmundson said she's a parent and a 20-year veteran teacher in Connecticut and is impressed with the Board of Education's hard work. She found the discussion from the Board of Finance troubling, noting their focus on increasing funds for town services (like an additional Firefighter and Senior bus) while proposing cuts that would negatively impact essential school resources (like a third second-grade teacher at Flanders and an extra high school Guidance Counselor.)

Note: She questioned why staff reductions were not discussed for town offices to mitigate cost increases like insurance and pensions, and why software reduction efforts seemed solely focused on the Board of Ed. She felt the Board of Finance scrutinized the Board of Ed's budget line by line but then spoke flippantly about reducing school staff without detailing similar reductions on the town side.

Note: Ms. Igmundson also questioned the prioritization of a \$250,000 boat over teachers and school resources, suggesting a detailed nitpicking of the Board of Ed's budget without a transparent equivalent for the town's budget, which she found frustrating as a mother and town resident.

Note: First Selectman Dan Cunningham responded, stating that cuts were indeed made to the town budget and positions were not filled as requested. He affirmed that they did go line item by line item through every single town department budget.

5-21. Esteban Garcia of 10 Winston Road

Note: Mr. Garcia said he's a Board of Education member and parent of a first and fifth grader. He discussed the accountability index and pointed out that while the index is important, a trend analysis reveals that both Madison and Rocky Hill have experienced a downward trend in their accountability index scores in recent years, likely due to budget cuts and reductions.

Note: He argued that rightsizing classes and making cuts can come at the expense of student outcomes and highlighted the importance of considering this. He noted that this information was readily available with minimal research.

Note: Mr. Garcia also emphasized the need for strategic thinking and long-term investment in schools, considering the lasting effects of the pandemic on students who will require continued support in the coming years to reach their full potential and become future professionals and contributors to the community.

5-22. Vivek Purohit of 48 Heritage Road

Note: Mr. Purohit said he's a current Board of Education member and shared that his family moved to East Lyme 18-19 years ago primarily for the school system, and his son, now a college sophomore, greatly benefited from it. He expressed pride in the school system's top 10 ranking in Connecticut and argued for maintaining and supporting its services rather than aiming for a lower ranking through cuts.

Note While acknowledging the Board of Finance's right to ask questions, he disagreed with their approach, particularly the focus on class size in AP classes. Drawing from his son's experience in challenging AP classes, he deemed it absurd to expect 20 students in all AP classes. He cited AP Music Theory as an example of a highly specialized AP subject not suitable for large class sizes and warned against limiting opportunities based on lower student numbers, especially for niche subjects like music.

Note He emphasized that education is not an on-off system and requires continuous investment for the future. He strongly urged the Board of Finance to reconsider the proposed cuts to the Board of Education.

5-23. Rita Quiles-Glover of 15 Merrywood Lane

Note Ms. Quiles-Glover said that she's a proud parent of a junior at East Lyme High School and an eighth grader at the middle school, the East Lyme Middle School PTA president, and an East Lyme graduate. She emphasized her and her husband's (also an East Lyme graduate and educator) decision to raise their family here due to the strong school system.

Note As a director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in another district, she has firsthand knowledge of the devastating impact of budget cuts on student resources and opportunities. She urged the Board to consider the impact of the proposed \$1.5 million cut, which includes eliminating seven teaching positions at the high school and even a guidance counselor. She questioned why changes would be made to a school already ranked number 10.

Note Ms. Quiles-Glover asserted that these cuts will lead to fewer course offerings, limiting students' college and career exploration, and larger class sizes (noting her son already has at least 20 students in all core classes). The cuts will also impact activities, clubs, and sports, as many teachers serve dual roles, increasing the burden on remaining staff and reducing the number of trusted adults' students can connect with.

Note She warned that once these positions are gone, they are difficult to reinstate, damaging the future strength of East Lyme for years. She attributed her son's remarkable growth to the variety and depth of courses with excellent teachers and administrators. She implored the Board to support the 6.72% Board of Education request, stating it's a necessity, not a luxury, to protect the quality of education.

5-24. Anthony Graesch of 51 Grouse Circle

Note Mr. Graesch, a voter and Professor at Connecticut College, stated his belief in public schools and acknowledged East Lyme's superior quality compared to his own. As a first-generation college student, lifelong learner, and educator, he emphasized the need for strong educational foundations.

Note While expressing empathy for the board's tough job with budgets being "moral documents" and the non-reversible nature of education cuts, he shared an anecdote from his experience with the New London scholars' program.

He stated that East Lyme students entering his classes at Connecticut College consistently outperform at least 50% of the college's incoming freshmen in preparedness and writing skills, and quickly develop critical analytic skills often surpassing even his seniors.

Note He said these cuts will negatively impact future performance, especially with projected enrollment increases. He urged the Board to find a way to lessen the severity of the cuts to preserve these strong foundations.

5-25. Nathan Butler 54 Charter Oak Drive

Note Mr. Butler, a retired Army veteran who relocated from New Hampshire specifically for the excellent East Lyme school district, expressed his gratitude to the School Board and Staff.

Note He voiced his disappointment regarding a statement on their slides suggesting that increased spending doesn't guarantee better student outcomes. As an outcome-based individual, he emphasized the importance of first defining desired outcomes and then planning accordingly.

Note Mr. Butler also shared his family's positive experiences with the East Lyme and Flanders libraries, noting his wife's role as PTA president and his own volunteer efforts. He urged the Board to reconsider potential budget cuts affecting library services and allow the town to vote on the matter.

5-26. Julie Wilson of 13 Park Place

Note As a town employee and a long-time resident who raised three daughters through the East Lyme school system, Ms. Wilson expressed strong support for the School Board's efforts. She emphasized that her family chose to remain in East Lyme after their children graduated to continue supporting the community and its schools.

Addressing taxpayers without children in the school system who might view the budget as too high, she urged them to reconsider and support the current students, reminding them that the community supported their children in the past.

5-27. Meryl Decarolis of 9 Pleasant Drive

Note Ms. Decarolis a high school special education teacher, mother of three, and concerned community member, spoke against the proposed budget cuts. She argued that these cuts would negatively impact students, especially those with disabilities. She discussed the necessity of adequate resources, staffing, and support services in special education, and emphasized that it both a legal and moral obligation.

Note She raised concerns about cuts to school supplies, noting the socioeconomic challenges many students face and the unfair burden on teachers. She also criticized the proposed elimination of the Pathways program, vital for the transition of students with disabilities to adulthood, and the reduction of field trips, crucial for social, emotional, and experiential learning.

Note Ms. Decarolis also expressed alarm over the potential removal of essential instructional software, which would hinder students' ability to thrive in a technology-driven world. The elimination of the athletic trainer position was also a concern for student athletes' health and safety.

Note She warned that the proposed cuts of seven high school staff positions would lead to increased class sizes, making differentiated instruction difficult and jeopardizing vulnerable students' futures. She stressed the importance of collaboration between special and general education staff, which would be weakened by these cuts.

Note Ms. Decarolis said the elimination of four unfilled paraprofessional positions is a "moral failing," and noted the essential role paraprofessionals play in supporting vulnerable students and the potential for increased teacher workload and turnover. She urged the Board to prioritize the education and well-being of all students and reconsider the proposed cuts.

5-28. Emily Raycraft of 19 Upper Walnut Hill Road

Note Ms. Raycraft thanked the Boards of Finance, Selectmen, and Education for their work on the town budget.

Note She acknowledged the difficult decisions but argued that the proposed Board of Education cuts contradict the idea of prioritizing needs over wants and maintaining the current standards; maintaining what the town has includes not only physical assets but also staff levels and morale, which are interconnected.

Note She questioned how previously agreed-upon salary increases and existing educational standards are now being considered wants rather than needs. She emphasized that staffing decisions have long-term impacts and that staff members are not easily replaceable.

5-29. Rachel Lansing of 13 Maplewood Drive

Note Ms. Lansing said she is a proud graduate of the East Lyme public schools with two daughters currently or soon-to-be in the system and pleaded with the Board to reconsider the proposed budget cuts.

Note She emphasized that well-funded public education benefits the entire community, not just families with students, contributing to property values and the local economy. Citing research, she noted the link between education and reduced crime, benefiting public safety.

Note Ms. Lansing detailed the irreplaceable value of the school staff and shared a personal experience about her neurodivergent daughter. In a previous school district with larger class sizes and limited support, her daughter struggled. In contrast, East Lyme's robust support services have allowed her daughter to flourish.

Note She urged the Board to maintain the level of support for students with learning challenges, emphasizing its profound impact on families like hers and their commitment to the town.

5-30. Nila Kaczor of 50 South Edgewood Road

Note Ms. Kaczor, the Vice President of the East Lyme Middle School PTA and a Connecticut educator of over 20 years, noted that she is speaking on behalf of students, families, and educators, and advocating against the proposed budget cuts.

Note She warned that these significant cuts would have devastating consequences on the quality of education, students, and staff, and that eliminating positions would lead to larger class sizes, reduced personalized attention, suffering extracurricular programs, and the disappearance of crucial support services.

Note Ms. Kaczor said that teachers and staff are more than just educators; they are mentors, role models, and lifelines, and reducing their numbers would negatively impact students' academic, emotional, and social development. She also noted that remaining teachers would face increased strain and risk burnout.

Note She stressed that the current excellence of East Lyme schools cannot be maintained with such deep cuts and that rebuilding programs and replacing staff would be difficult and costly.

Note She urged the Board to reconsider the reductions, noting that strong schools are the heart of the community, leading to stronger property values, greater civic engagement, and a brighter future for East Lyme. She added that investing in education is an investment in the town's future.

5-31. Lindsay Sung of 7 Hickory Court

Note Ms. Sung introduced her son Alexander Shu, a first grader at Lily B. Haynes Elementary School. Alexander said he's sad to hear the school might get less money. He's worried they might not have enough supplies for art and music and that there will be fewer teachers to help. He wants his friends and little brother to have the same good things he has at school. He also remembers when they took away Spanish and didn't bring it back, so he hopes they don't lose other important things forever. Alexander said school helps kids learn and grow, and he asked the Board not to cut the school's money because it really matters to them.

5-32. Olivia Blodgett of 30 Lake Avenue

Note Ms. Blodgett shared that 15 years ago, she and her wife Jessica, both 19 at the time, planned to settle permanently in Niantic. They bought Jessica's childhood home with the intention of it being their forever home and starting a family. She described their current reality as a dream come true: her wife walking their daughter and other elementary students one block to school.

Note Speaking on behalf of her wife Jessica, Ms. Blodgett said she's a physical education teacher at Niantic Center School. She expressed that the proposed cuts would not only result in the loss of her job but also her dream. She emphasized the school's deep connection to her family history, mentioning her grandfather who attended the school and later organized its children's theater, a program that significantly impacted many students' lives.

Note She expressed pride in having been a student there and now having her own children attend. For Jessica, the school is more than a workplace; it's a commitment to providing students with lasting experiences beyond textbook lessons. While acknowledging the pain of budget cuts, she stressed that the school's heart lies in its dedicated people and pleaded to be allowed to continue being one of them.

5-33. Leanne Spino-Seijas of 17 Plum Hill

Note Ms. Spino-Seijas explained that her family moved to East Lyme in the summer of 2022. They chose East Lyme solely based on the reputation of its school district, without ever having visited the town prior to looking at their house. She emphasized that they are committed to the community long-term, as they have a first grader at Lily B. Haynes and a younger child who will soon enter kindergarten.

Note While acknowledging the difficult job of the Boards and understanding that they don't directly control the Board of Education's specific cuts, she pointed out that the voters are clearly expressing their desires. She urged them to listen to their constituents.

She argued that not increasing the budget to cover rising costs effectively constitutes a cut, which will slowly erode the very reasons why families like hers moved to East Lyme. She urged the Board to reconsider, put more money back into the budget, and allow the voters to decide.

5-34. Bonnie Dombrowski of 103 Walnut Hill Road

Note Ms. Dombrowski requested that the Board reconsider the proposed \$1.5 million cut to the Board of Education budget and instead reinstate at least half, \$750,000, to allow voters to decide on an appropriate budget level.

While acknowledging the reality of rising taxes from both town government and the Board of Ed, she argued that a \$1.5 million cut places a disproportionate burden on schools, teachers, and students. She countered the idea that the Board of Finance doesn't shape education decisions, stating that a cut of this magnitude inevitably influences those choices.

Note: She posed two questions regarding the Board's presentation- whether there's data on staff morale at Daniel Hand School alongside their staff-to-student ratios, and if, given their bus tour of town departments, they would consider a similar visit to the schools.

Note: Ms. Hall replied that they did visit East Lyme High School, although it was near the end of the 5-previous budget cycle. She added that it was considered to be one of the biggest sources of wants and needs.

Note: Ms. Montovani introduced herself as coming from a family of educators; her husband teaches PE in East Lyme, and she is an Assistant Principal in another district. While acknowledging that she has only attended budget meetings in her own district, she has followed the East Lyme discussions. She feels that the previous speakers have already conveyed the widespread desire to restore the proposed budget cuts and allow taxpayers to decide for themselves.

Note: She that in her 18-year career, she has experienced pay cuts three times and is once again advocating instead of being home with her daughters. She pointed out the irony of these potential cuts with teacher appreciation approaching. She also pointed out that unfunded state mandates, such as Right to Read, literacy training, restorative practices, and purposeful play, require significant financial resources.

Note: Ms. Montovani argued for equity across town departments, suggesting that the education department is disproportionately affected by cuts while other departments see increases or maintain the status quo in areas like office furniture, paving, storage sheds, and overtime.

Note: She offered specific examples of potential savings in other departments, such as reducing paving, questioning the necessity of a new storage shed, and comparing overtime expenses. She also suggested modernizing communication in other departments to reduce costs like postage, as the education department has done with digital platforms.

5-36. Michael McCormack of 10 Brookfield Drive

Note: Mr. McCormack noted that many of the points he intended to make had already been raised. However, he emphasized the significant number of people, including himself, who chose to live in East Lyme specifically because of the excellent schools, either for themselves as children or for their own families. He shared that despite other options, like Stonington with a higher accountability rating, they selected East Lyme due to its outstanding school district.

Note: He argued that the proposed cuts would impact the entire town, not just the students' education, but also potentially lower home values as fewer people would want to move to a downsizing school district. He questioned why, being ranked tenth according to some list, the town wasn't striving to be even higher. He expressed confusion as to why such significant cuts were being considered when the overwhelming sentiment in the room was to support the schools.

Note: Mr. McCormack asked for a show of hands of those who were either brought to East Lyme for its schools or are now parents supporting the schools, suggesting that the majority present, likely even some on the Board of Finance, benefited from the East Lyme public school system. He pleaded with the Board to reconsider the large cuts, stating that he wants his children to have the same good resources he had, which enabled his own higher education.

5-37. Fred Altvater of 20 Church Lane

Note: Mr. Altvater said he's a senior citizen and moved to East Lyme 10 years ago partly because of its strong school system, anticipating it would maintain his property value. Although his children are grown, he believes educating youth is everyone's duty. As someone on a fixed income, he is mindful of taxes but feels that investing in education is crucial.

Note He questioned the necessity of certain town expenditures, like a fire boat, suggesting the Coast Guard could handle some water rescues.

Note He urged the Board of Finance to restore the proposed cuts and allow voters, including seniors like himself, to decide whether funding education is a priority.

5-38. Deborah Stewart-Van Orden of 21 Hillwood Drive

Note Ms. Stewart-Van Orden said she's an Electric Boat employee who is not a parent and chose to buy her home in East Lyme due to the area's rising property values and the reputation of its education system, seeing it as an investment in the future. As part of the community, she believes the decision on the school budget should go to the voters to determine if investing in students, the town's future, and real estate values is worthwhile, as these are key reasons why people choose to live in East Lyme.

5-39. Matt Sardo of 15 Upper Kensington Drive

Note Mr. Sardo said he's been a resident since 2022 with three daughters attending Flanders Elementary, expressed concern about the proposed cuts affecting their second-grade class. He shared his practice of showing his children where their property tax money goes, specifically to their schools. He finds it concerning to prioritize the town's credit score over the education of children. He pointed out the \$1.5 million figure in the budget and urged the Board to find a way to allocate it to the Board of Education to address the funding gap.

5-40. Brian Zunstecker of 8 Cove Hill Road

Note Mr. Zunstecker felt that many key points had already been made. He reframed the issue by emphasizing the fiscal irresponsibility of short-sighted cuts to education, as it is the foundation for everything else in the town. He pointed out the overwhelming public support for restoring the funding, urging the Board to base their decision on this information.

He also cautioned against creating a divisive narrative that pits those with children in schools against those without, suggesting a more unified "village" approach in their messaging to foster better collaboration within the town.

5-41. Harper Schultz of 79 Dean Road (Student)

Note Ms. Schultz said she's a proud member of the Breakers and former Sea Dog and expressed concern about the proposed school budget cuts. She acknowledged the Board's important role in the community but stated bluntly that she disagreed with this decision. She emphasized the positive impact of her teachers and noted that she couldn't imagine her life without them. She also shared that her brother, a former student, would be disappointed to see teachers being cut, as they both value learning.

5-42. Sarah Susco of 25 Willow Lane

Note Ms. Susco thanked the Board for their difficult job. She noted the recurring theme of property values in discussions, including a recent zoning meeting, and emphasized the shared goal of excellent education and a desirable town. She argued that cutting a significant amount from the budget directly contradicts this goal.

Note She urged the Board to restore the entire proposed budget, not just a portion, for the sake of the children and the town.

Note She also expressed concern about the potential elimination of four paraprofessional positions, highlighting their importance for special needs students, providing teacher support, improving instruction, and ensuring a smooth school day.

5-43. Avenus Ngra, no address given (Student)

Note Ms. Ngra shared that she's a freshman at East Lyme High School, and speaking on behalf of many students and staff who would be significantly impacted by the proposed budget cut. She stated that the \$1.5 million funding reduction would lead to teacher layoffs and the elimination of numerous classes and electives that students are passionate about and wish to pursue.

Note She expressed concern about being asked to do more with fewer resources, including fewer choices, larger classes, fewer teachers, and fewer opportunities for self-discovery. She highlighted the importance of AP courses for college competitiveness and skill development, noting that some scholarships specifically seek AP coursework.

Note She mentioned the negative consequences of budget cuts at Ensen High School in California in 2008, which led to the elimination of AP classes and teacher layoffs, and the permanent closure of Riverpoint Academy in Washington, a STEM-focused school. She warned that these cuts could leave students less prepared for college, increase dropout rates, and limit career prospects, ultimately harming the community with a less educated workforce.

She urged decision-makers to consider the long-term effects and seek alternative solutions that prioritize students' educational needs and future success.

5-44. Maya D'Aquila of 46 Rathbun Hill Road, Salem (Student)

Note Ms. D'Aquila, a senior at East Lyme High School, emphasized that the proposed cuts are not just about positions but about people who have dedicated many years to the school system and are deeply committed to their students.

Note She expressed her gratitude for her public education in East Lyme, noting that she is saving thousands of dollars on college through credits earned in AP and ECE classes, programs that are facing budget cuts.

Note She challenged the Board to "put their money where their mouth is" if they truly believe in the quality of East Lyme High School, arguing that the cuts are not just affecting teachers but also students' opportunities.

Note Ms. D'Aquila questioned what message cutting education spending sends about the community's values and whether it accurately reflects them, stating that she thinks not.

5-45. Virginia Bowler of 80 Emerald Glen Lane, Salem (Student)

Note Ms. Bowler, a senior, stated she wouldn't be where she is today without the excellent teachers at East Lyme High School. Her family moved to East Lyme specifically for the school system in 2018. She cited online statistics showing high satisfaction among students and parents regarding teacher engagement, care, and classroom management. She also highlighted the favorable 11 to 1 student-teacher ratio as ensuring quality education. She emphasized that teachers are passionate and skilled individuals, not just financial figures, and urged the Board to consider how much they value the next generation's education.

5-46. Theodore Francis of 39 Pattagansett Drive (Student)

Note: Mr. Francis, a senior at East Lyme High School with an IEP for autism, explained that students with similar needs in the past might not have received the necessary support and could have failed. He credits his success in high school to the dedicated team of case workers, psychologists, social workers, and classroom teachers who believed in him.

He shared that he is now a straight-A student taking multiple AP and ECE classes and acknowledged that supporting students like him is expensive. He emphasized the integral role of the special needs support staff and asserted that cuts would cause students like him to "slip through the cracks." As a new taxpayer, he stated that he wants his tax dollars to prioritize education.

5-47. Emma Frisbie of 233 Upper Pattagansett Road (Student)

Note: Ms. Frisbie explained that she is a sophomore at East Lyme High School and the Connecticut Poetry Out Loud and National History Day State Champion. She emphasized that the achievements and the opportunities available to her are due to teachers who volunteer their time to run clubs and support students. She argued that cutting teachers directly impacts the faculty's ability to help students like her.

Note: While acknowledging the importance of budgets, she stressed that behind every number is a dedicated human-being -- a teacher who provides extra help, support, and belief in their students. She stated that cutting these positions means losing mentors, role models, and the heart of the school, and she stood in solidarity with her teachers, hoping the Board will do the same.

5-48. Anita Basu of 4 Wynn Circle

Note: Ms. Basu, a 12-year resident of the East Lyme School District, addressed the Board, urging them to restore critical funding to the schools. She highlighted the high school's ranking, which acknowledges the dedication of staff and the diverse curriculum.

She emphasized that proposed reductions in staff and courses would negatively impact students. She stressed the importance of teachers, citing their personal feedback, motivation, and unique contributions. She mentioned specific teachers and their valuable roles in the school community.

Ms. Basu urged the Board of Finance to restore funding and the Board of Education to consider alternative solutions to these reductions.

5-49. Darcy Dombrowski of 103 Walnut Hill Road (Student)

Note: Ms. Dombrowski shared that she's a freshman and a member of the school senate and is addressing the Board on behalf of her classmates, teachers, and staff who will be affected by proposed budget cuts.

Note: She highlighted the potential loss of seven high school teachers, including her freshman wellness teacher who made a significant positive impact on her first semester. Ms. Dombrowski emphasized the importance of teachers, especially those who are also club sponsors and coaches, noting the valuable learning and growth that occurs in extracurricular activities.

Note: While acknowledging the Board of Education's role in budget allocation, she respectfully requested the Board reconsider the overall budget cut to minimize the negative impacts on students and prevent hardworking teachers from losing their jobs, suggesting a compromise to reinstate at least half of the proposed cut.

5-50. Auggie Bryant of 95 Walnut Hill Road (Student)

Note: Ms. Bryant shared that she's a sophomore who has deep family ties to the school system and town and expressed concern that the proposed budget cuts would reduce the quality of education, which was a primary reason her family moved to the town.

Note She questioned the accuracy of the projected class sizes, stating her and her friends' current class sizes are in the lower 20s, unlike the presented figures. She argued that increased class sizes negatively impact student learning by reducing personalized attention and time for in-depth discussion.

Note She was also disappointed by the potential loss of electives, particularly biotech, a hands-on science class that sparked her and a friend's interest in related fields. Ms. Bryant noted the importance of diverse course offerings for exploring different career paths.

5-51. Alya Peterson of 6 Brook Road (Student)

Note Alya Peterson, a senior who moved to East Lyme High School from another state, emphasized that the school offers much more than just graduation, as she will be leaving with 12 college credits thanks to dedicated teachers like Mr. Hernandez and Mrs. Buckley.

Note She argued that cutting the budget would harm many students by jeopardizing AP, ECE, and honors courses, as well as other important classes. Ms. Peterson highlighted the impact of teachers like Mrs. Archer, whose presence is deeply valued by students.

Note She asserted that teachers are not just cuts but important individuals and that the Board has a responsibility to ensure a high-quality education.

Note She urged the Board to reconsider the budget cuts, stating that their implementation would lower the quality of education and limit future students' opportunities for success.

5-52. Sofia Selk of 2 Lovers Lane (Student)

Note Ms. Selk, a freshman at East Lyme High School, expressed her concern about the proposed \$1.5 million education budget cut, despite not being old enough to vote. She values the small class sizes, meaningful teacher relationships, and diverse electives that make her high school experience great, all of which she fears will be negatively impacted.

Note She is worried about losing a favorite teacher, increased class sizes, teacher burnout, and the potential elimination of electives and accelerated courses crucial for college readiness, noting her positive experience in creative writing. Her family moved to East Lyme specifically for its excellent schools, highlighting that strong schools attract families and unite communities, and urged the Board not to undermine this.

5-53. Zoe Coracken, no address given (Student)

Note Ms. Coracken, a 16-year-old junior at East Lyme High School, addressed the Board to advocate for the teachers facing potential budget cuts, emphasizing their profound impact on her life. She named seven specific teachers: Mr. Sherah (Creative Writing), Ms. Buckley (English and Science), Ms. Mashad (Art), Ms. Jenkins (Psychology), Ms. Capusta (library), and her Counselor Jacqueline Sullivan, detailing how each has provided her with safety, challenge, support, and guidance.

Note She highlighted the personal connections and the crucial roles these educators play in her academic and personal growth, extending beyond just academics to include her well-being and future aspirations. She stressed that teachers are not just budget items but essential people who support students and urged the Board to retain them in the school system.

6. Board Comments

Note There were none.

7. Adjournment

Decision MOTION (1)

Mr. Birmingham moved to adjourn the April 28th, 2025, BOF Public Hearing at 10:32 p.m.

Ms. McNamara seconded the motion.

Motion carried, 6-0-0.

Note Respectfully Submitted,
Brooke Stevens, Recording Secretary