



DOUGLAS B. HARDING
Chairman

STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

55 MAIN STREET – PO BOX 187
ELLINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06029-0187
www.ellington-ct.gov

DANIEL KEUNE
Vice Chairmen

BOARD OF FINANCE

BUDGET DELIBERATIONS

May 29, 2025

MAURICE BLANCHETTE
LOGAN JOHNSON
ELIZABETH NORD
BARRY C. PINTO

Minutes

Members Present: Douglas Harding, Daniel Keune, Barry Pinto, Maurice Blanchette, Liz Nord, Logan Johnson – via zoom.

Others Present: Matt Reid – Town Administrator, Tiffany Pignataro – Finance Officer/Treasurer, Miriam Underwood – BOE, Bob Smith – EFVD, Heather Smith – EVFD, Jennifer Dzen – BOE, Marcy Blanchette – Library, Angie Moser – BOE, Alisha Carpino – Director of Finance & Operations, Dr. Scott Nicol – Superintendent, Kristen Harp – Youth Services, Sheila Grady – Senior Center, Jenn Mullin – BOE, John Turner – BOS, Pete Hany – EVAC, David Stavens – BOS, Jim York – Fire Marshall, Lori Spielman – First Selectmen, Steve Veins – BOE, Miriam Underwood – BOE, Kerry Socha – BOE, Amy McKeon – resident via zoom, Dan Moore – resident via zoom, Scott Hunter – resident via zoom, Kyle Hadden – resident via zoom, Karen Neal – resident via zoom, Dustin Huguenin – Parks & Rec via zoom, Susan Dyne – resident via zoom, Nicole Caron – resident via zoom, Melissa Scarbrough – EHS employee via zoom, Megan Johnson – resident via zoom, Marge Laptik – resident via zoom, Eric Schmidit – resident via zoom, Vikas Kumar – resident via zoom, Brandon Hubrins – resident via zoom, Bruce Hoffman – EVAC via zoom, Keith Danforth – resident via zoom, Eric W – resident via zoom, Kristen Doughtry – resident via zoom, Tim Thomas – resident via zoom, Tom Palshaw – Resident, Susan Phillips – Library via zoom, Mary Cardin – BOS via zoom, Peggy Busse – resident via zoom.

Call to Order

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm.

Pledge of Allegiance

Public Comment

None came forward.

Budget Deliberations

The Board stated the meeting talking about public safety, specifically the EVAC budget. Originally, the proposal included reducing the two full-time EMTs, which would result in a budget reduction. The remaining \$150,000 needed would come from flat-funding the appropriation using the town's fund balance. This would keep the budget flat compared to the current year, meaning it wouldn't move forward, but also wouldn't regress. Mrs. Pignataro stated when meeting with the credit rating agency, this flat approach wouldn't show progress, but it would avoid downgrades.

Bob Smith, Chief of the Ellington Fire Department, expressed concern about the rising call volume. He noted delays in receiving mutual aid ambulances are time-consuming and hoped there could be other options explored. John Turner from the Board of Selectmen acknowledged the importance of adding a supervisor but emphasized the need for two ambulances due to the frequency of second and third calls. Peter Hany, Ambulance Chief, stated he would prefer to allocate funds to manpower rather than supervision. He emphasized that calls are increasing and what's needed is staff, not someone to oversee operations.

Tiffany Pignataro suggested keeping the positions but removing the additional funding from the charging fund. Tiffany noted that as of the end of April, \$518,000 was available in the charging fund, which already includes a \$200,000 contribution in the current budget. There are still two months left in the fiscal year, meaning additional revenue is expected.

Peggy Busse – resident: disagreed with the idea that the voters rejected the ambulance funding. She said many residents she spoke with did not vote because they supported the budget and thought it would pass. She strongly believes public safety should not be compromised.

Mitchell Laforge – EVAC: emphasized that the entire budget was voted down, not just the ambulance funding. He said the benefits of a second ambulance were clear and that the safety of the town is justified in the investment.

Mariaham Underwood, a resident and Board of Education member, echoed the importance of public safety.

Tom Palshaw – resident: stated these are life-saving services and urged the board to look elsewhere in the budget instead of the charging fund.

Bruce Hoffman, Assistant Vice President EVAC, pointed out that the current part-time ambulance staff has been successfully handling second and third calls and generating revenue for the town.

Doug asked for the board's opinion on using the charging fund. Mr. Keune and Mrs. Nord agreed with the idea. Mr. Blanchette said the original budget presented was responsible, but acknowledged that not enough people voted. The budget deliberations had previously pushed the EVAC changes to a September 1st start date. Mr. Blanchette also expressed concern that while the charging fund could be used, it's not a reliable year-over-year funding source.

Mrs. Nord said preserving the positions is essential and if the charging fund must be used, it should be. Mr. Johnson stated that if the town wants to maintain this level of service, it will eventually need to be reflected in taxes. Only 9.5% of voters participated in the last vote. Mr. Pinto supported using the charging fund, saying it revealed a gap in awareness about town finances.

Mr. Reed emphasized that this EVAC upgrade has been a goal and that the system could be self-sustaining through revenue recovery. A second ambulance would improve efficiency and revenue potential.

Vikas Kumar – resident: pointed out the increase in mental health-related and physical emergency calls, warning that missed second or third calls mean someone in need is not receiving help.

Mr. Hany cautioned against relying on the charging fund. He explained it had been used to purchase ambulances in the past and is not a limitless resource. Ambulance revenue could decrease, especially since Medicaid pays less than private insurance.

Mr. Harding added that overuse of the charging fund could lead to future tax increases.

The board ultimately agreed to fund \$150,000 from the charging fund and another \$150,000 from town funds. Bruce Hoffman supported maintaining the two full-time EMT positions and suggested eliminating the new director position if necessary, to maintain operations.

Mr. Reed clarified that his proposals are based on recommendations from a 2016 report. He noted that the Emergency Risk Management position had been removed and that its responsibilities would be divided between him and the new EVAC director.

Shifting to the Board of Education, Mr. Harding stated the board initially requested \$500,000.

Jennifer Dzen – BOE: reported that the board had just received \$300,000 in unexpected funding from the ECS and Excess Cost Grants due to legislative changes. The Excess Cost funding helps cover additional expenses, totaling \$477,000. She warned that if the new budget doesn't pass, the district would face cuts to sports programs and teaching staff.

Dr. Nicol voiced concern that the town may be developing a pattern of rejecting the first budget and passing a second one, which could lead to future increases. He noted the \$300,000 wasn't available back in February and believes it's a good amount to bring to the voters now.

The First Selectman stated residents have asked about employee raises and why the Board of Education can't make more cuts. Dr. Nicol explained that the board has analyzed administrative staffing and determined that it is essential to keep two assistant principals at the high school due to legal and educational requirements. Without the current administrative structure, the school would not be able to meet student needs.

Steve Veins – BOE: noted that Ellington spends less per student (\$18,000) compared to the state median (\$23,000), reflecting good value in education.

John Turner – BOS: stated he taught in the school district for 36 years, praising Dr. Nicol's leadership and acknowledged the increased burden placed on schools.

Mr. Harding asked whether it was too risky to rely on ECS money, since it's not yet finalized.

Mrs. Pignataro explained that to achieve a 1.1 mill increase, the town would need \$225,000 in cuts from operations. For a 1.0 mill increase, \$375,000 would be needed; to reach 0.99 mills, a \$500,000 cut would be necessary.

Mr. Keune stated the board needed to set a target to guide both the town and the Board of Education. Members shared their targets: Pinto proposed 1.0, Morris 1.25, Johnson 1.1, Nord 1.1, Keune 1.0, and Harding 1.1. The board reached a consensus of a 1.1 mill increase, requiring \$225,000 in cuts from the Board of Education.

Angie Moser – BOE: said that many residents still don't fully understand what's happening with the budget and asked how the town could better communicate.

Mary Blanchette – BOS: said her neighbors didn't vote because they believed the town would find the money elsewhere, and now that's exactly what's happening. Mr. Johnson stated the town is taking a real risk and is fortunate the BOE received additional funding.

Melissa Scarbrough – EHS Employee: said the district has been stretching its budget for years and that everyone is feeling the strain. She emphasized the importance of keeping Ellington a strong and thriving community.

The meeting recessed at 8:09 p.m. and resumed at 8:14 p.m.

A motion to reduce the following budget revenue accounts current year levy \$544,869.

MOVED (JOHNSON) SECONDED (KEUNE) AND PASSED
UNANIMOUSLY TO REDUCE THE FOLLOWING BUDGET REVENUE
ACCOUNTS
CURRENT YEAR LEVY \$544,869

MOVE TO INCREASE THE FOLLOWING BUDGET REVENUE ACCOUNTS
AMBULANCE FEE PROGRAM \$149,543
EDUCATION COST SHARING GRANTS \$144,539
APPROPRIATION-FUND BALANCE \$170,326;

MOVE TO REDUCE THE FOLLOWING BUDGET EXPENDITURE ACCOUNTS
1301-60501 BOE EXPENDITURES \$80,461

FURTHER MOVED THAT THE SUM OF MONEY
RECOMMENDED FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025-26 IS 72,764,777
ALL EDUCATION COST SHARING GRANTS (ECS)
ARE DEEMED TO BE APPROPRIATED TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

FURTHER MOVE TO RECOMMEND TO THE ANNUAL BUDGET MEETING THE FOLLOWING
ITEMS:

GENERAL GOVERNMENT	2,340,550
BOARDS, AGENCIES, COMMISSIONS	125,156
PUBLIC SAFETY	3,723,921
PUBLIC WORKS	5,622,911
CULTURAL ARTS & RECREATION	844,270
LIBRARY	792,619
HUMAN SERVICES	966,403
TOWN PROPERTIES	784,778
DEBT SERVICE	3,165,042
FIXED CHARGES	3,920,772
MISCELLANEOUS	812,301
 GENERAL GOVERNMENT TOTAL	 23,098,723
 CAPITAL OUTLAY	 1,744,642
 BOE	 47,921,412
 BUDGET GRAND TOTAL	 72,764,777

Adjournment

MOVED (BLANCHETTE) SECONDED (NORD) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJURN THE MEETING AT 8:18 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Elizabeth Luginbuhl, Recording Secretary

