



LOGAN JOHNSON
Chairman

STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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ELIZABETH NORD
Vice Chairmen

BOARD OF FINANCE

SPECIAL MEETING

March 18, 2026

MAURICE BLANCHETTE
DOUGLAS HARDING
DANIEL KEUNE
GOMATHI RAMACHANDRAN

Minutes

Members Present: Logan Johnson, Liz Nord, Dan Keune, Doug Harding, Maurice Blanchette, Gomathi Ramachandran.

Others Present: Matt Reed – Town Administrator, Tiffany Pignataro – Finance Officer, Jennifer Dzen – BOE, Tom Modzelewski – DPW Director, Peter Hany – EVAC, Peggy Busse – Library, Susan Philips – Library, Rebecca Stack – Human Services, Kristen Harp – Youth Services Director, , Sheila Grady – Senior Center, Dustin Hugin – Rec Department, Kevin Barrett – Rec Department, Craig Webb – EMS Director, Tom Boscarino – Rec Department, Trish Brudz – Library, Tim Seitz – Crystal Lake Fire, Cole Prato – EVFD, Jamie Boucher – BOS, Charolette Ward – BOS, Jenn Mullin – BOE, Arthur Biryukas – IT, Pete Hany – EVAC, Alisha Carpino – BOE, Oliver Barton – Acting Superintendent, James Prichard – BOS, Robert Smith – EVFD, David Stavens – BOS, Tim Merrill - CSP, Alisha Smith – resident, John Turner – resident, Lori Spielman – resident, Tom Palshaw – resident, Julianna Rogalla – resident, David Panagrosso – resident, Shay Drake – resident, Jeff Fluckiger, Michael Wearne Sr – resident, Bria Dubois – resident, Roy Anindy – resident, Subhra Anindy – resident, Perry Dikeman – resident, Evin Roberson – resident, Warren McGrath - resident, Lisa Houlihan – Planning Department via zoom, Mary Blanchette – BOS via zoom, Karl stocker – EVFD via zoom, Mark Plourde – resident via zoom, Karel Ortolani – resident via zoom, Amy McKeon – resident via zoom, Dianne Trube – resident via zoom, Melissa Scarbrough – resident via zoom, Patty Perkins – resident via zoom, Sam Saunders – DPW via zoom, Don Moore – resident via zoom, Linda Robinson – resident via zoom, Stephanie Veturis – BOE via zoom, Kristy LaPorte – resident via zoom, Rebecca Einisiedel - Administrative Assistant via zoom, Katie Herrity – resident via zoom.

Call to Order

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 6:03 pm.

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call

All members present.

Public Comment

Jack Turner – 29 Fairview Avenue: Mr. Turner said the town does an excellent job managing taxpayer money and noted that Ellington performs better than many other towns. He spoke about the importance of funding emergency services, including ambulance, police, and fire.

Tom Modzelewski – Public Works: Mr. Modzelewski stated that departments worked together to present responsible budgets that maintain services in Ellington. He explained that rising costs have made this difficult, and the requested cuts would negatively impact town services. He added that the town cannot control certain costs, such as utilities, and that all departments are keeping taxpayers in mind, making it hard to recommend further reductions.

Peggy Busse – 37 Abbott: Mrs. Busse said budget discussions often start with the concern that voters may reject the proposal, as this has become more common. She noted that property assessments did not increase equally for everyone. Based on conversations she has had, many residents understand that costs are rising and believe the increase is justified. She added that if cuts are too drastic, voters may vote no because they do not want to lose services.

Miriam Underwood – 15 Eva Circle:

Mrs. Underwood said the proposed cuts would save her only about \$20 per month and urged the board not to reduce the budget.

Lori Spielman – 179 Abbott Road:

Lori said she does not support cutting the dump truck purchase, noting that delaying it would likely increase costs significantly. She also raised concerns about Parks and Recreation, especially lifeguards. Residents want the lake open longer, and she said people will be unhappy if they are paying more but receiving fewer services. She encouraged the town not to move backward.

Budget Discussion – General Government and Board of Education (FY2026–2027)

Mr. Johnson stated that core services cannot be compromised and are essential to the community.

Mrs. Dzen said the Board of Education was able to find an additional \$250,000 in reductions. She explained that these cuts would impact programs, positions, and curriculum. She noted that Ellington currently ranks 7th in return on investment per student. With enrollment expected to increase by about 25 students next year and costs continuing to rise, she said the budget reflects a 2.3% increase, just over \$1 million year over year. She also noted a 4% union contract increase. She warned that further cuts would impact students and could lead to eliminating clubs to preserve staffing.

Mr. Keune said the level of reductions requested was higher than expected and has put the board in a difficult position, including staff reductions. He added that these cuts could lead to a 5–6% increase next year to restore services.

Ms. Dzen noted that other revenue options are uncertain due to the early timing of the budget process and pending legislation. Mr. Johnson added that any additional funding from legislation would be applied if it becomes available.

Mrs. Pignataro said there has been strong concern from residents and encouraged reviewing what is happening in surrounding communities. She noted that few towns are below a 3% increase given current conditions. She emphasized that many proposed cuts affect services that residents value most and asked the board to consider the impact.

The board began to review the proposed reductions.

Mr. Blanchette stated he does not support the proposed cuts and believes the budget should go to voters as is. He said delaying needs will only make things worse.

Ms. Dzen explained that the \$103,547 high school audio/visual upgrade includes a program that would allow students to communicate with astronauts. She shared this as an example of what could be lost, but noted the priority remains funding staff.

Mrs. Pignataro reviewed the proposed reductions.

- Capital Improvement cuts: \$1,047,547
- Public Works operating (400 accounts): \$132,357
- Public Works (800 accounts): \$39,640
- Total Public Works operating cut: \$171,997
- Total DPW cut: \$1,219,544
- Other operating cuts: \$691,906
- **Total proposed reductions: \$1,739,453**

She noted that many of these items will return in future budgets if not funded now.

Public Comment (Continued)

Peggy Busse – 37 Abbott: Mrs. Busse suggested reviewing the library budget, noting it has been decreasing due to retirements and lower-cost hires.

Tom Palshaw – 120 Pinney Street: Mr. Palshaw noted that NASA plans to retire the International Space Station by 2030 and questioned how long the program would be used. He thanked the board for gathering public input.

Dianne Trueb – 105 Pinnacle Road: Mrs. Trueb asked about the total combined budget increase, which was stated as 4.15% (Board of Education, Town, and Capital). She asked about eliminating lifeguards and whether the beach would close or operate as swim at your own risk. Mr. Reed said both options are being considered, with swim at your own risk most likely. She also noted that removing public restrooms would create safety concerns and that more residents should see what is being cut.

Mr. Huguenin – Parks & Recreation: Mr. Huguenin stated that drowning is the leading cause of death for children under five and warned that removing lifeguards increases risk.

Jenn Mullin – 9 Laurel Road: Ms. Mullins asked if removing lifeguards would increase insurance costs.

Mrs. Nord: Mrs. Nord said she does not support removing anything that affects community safety.

Charlotte Ward – 3 Woodland Trail/BOS: Mrs. Ward said every taxpayer has a different view of what is essential, but emphasized the importance of school funding and community safety for both the children and seniors.

John Kuehn – 17 Hillsdale Drive: Mr. Keune said no one wants higher taxes but acknowledged they may be necessary. He suggested breaking the increase down into a monthly cost to help residents better understand the impact.

Dianne Trueb (additional comment): Mrs. Trueb suggested assigning someone to share clear budget information on social media. Mr. Johnson responded and said efforts are underway to improve communication. Mr. Blanchette said information has been shared through meetings and public presentations, but more residents need to attend and stay informed.

Mr. Johnson said the budget will be published as is, along with the list of proposed cuts, so residents understand the full impact.

Additional Discussion

Mr. Blanchette asked about tax relief for seniors. Mr. Reed confirmed programs are available through the assessor's office and are listed on the town website.

Roy Anindy – 2 Samantha Court: Roy said rising costs are impacting all families and that every dollar matters. He encouraged reviewing all line items and balancing needs with affordability.

Mrs. Pignataro explained that even with a flat budget, the recent revaluation would result in an average tax increase of about \$600.

Mr. Johnson said homeowners are now responsible for a larger share of the tax burden. He stated this trend is expected to continue over the next five years and that delaying decisions will not improve affordability.

Mr. Reed noted there is a tax calculator available on the town website. He also commended the Board of Education for keeping increases relatively low. On behalf of the First Selectman, he expressed concern that the town will change if the proposed cuts move forward.

Bill Keohane – 2 East Shore Road: Mr. Kohen asked about average increases.

Jenn Mullin – 9 Laurel Road: Ms. Mullins encouraged residents to have conversations in everyday settings, such as grocery stores and the library, to help spread awareness and educate others.

Closing

Mr. Johnson confirmed the town will proceed to publish the current budget, along with the proposed reductions, so residents can clearly see the impact.

Mr. Keune asked the Board of Education to provide a detailed list of proposed reductions. Mrs. Dzen confirmed it is being prepared.

Mr. Johnson thanked everyone for their attendance and input.

Next Meeting: April 14 – Public Hearing.

Adjournment

MOVED (BLANCHETTE) SECONDED (NORD) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:16 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Elizabeth Luginbuhl

Elizabeth Luginbuhl, Recording Secretary

FY27 Budget Summary of Potential Cuts

<u>CIP</u>			<u>Notes</u>	
Dump Truck	\$	58,000.00	Reduced by the amount remaining in CIP & Revenue from Asset sales	
Fire Truck	\$	310,000.00	Remove - propose to debt finance with deferred first payment	
Police Interceptor	\$	80,000.00	Eliminated 1 cruiser - Police	
Sidewalk Plow	\$	80,000.00	Eliminated - Will request next year	
HS AV Upgrades	\$	103,547.00	Eliminated - High School	
Modern Classroom Furniture	\$	30,000.00	Eliminated - Middle School	
BOE Vehicle Replacement	\$	30,000.00	Eliminated	
Vacuum Trailer	\$	36,000.00	Eliminated - Will request next year	
Unimproved Roads	\$	25,000.00	Reduced	
Culvert Maintenance	\$	20,000.00	Eliminated - Will request next year	
Bridge Maintenance	\$	20,000.00	Eliminated - Will request next year	
Sidewalks/Trails	\$	20,000.00	Eliminated - Will request next year	
Guiderail Program	\$	20,000.00	Eliminated - Will request next year	
Parking Lot Maintenance	\$	30,000.00	Eliminated - Will request next year	
Hall Memorial Library	\$	75,000.00	Eliminated - Will request next year	
Town Hall/Annex	\$	40,000.00	Eliminated - Will request next year	
DPW Maintenance	\$	20,000.00	Eliminated - Will request next year	
T&B-Ball Courts	\$	25,000.00	Eliminated - Will request next year	
High School Track	\$	25,000.00	Eliminated - Will request next year	
Total CIP	\$	1,047,547.00		
<u>Operating</u>				
<u>400s</u>				
Mechanic 1	\$	39,801.00	Eliminated. Will request next year.	
Health Ins	\$	18,288.00	For mechanic position	
Tax	\$	3,045.00	For mechanic position	
Deferred Comp	\$	4,673.00	For mechanic position	
Overtime			Held Flat	\$ 15,582.00
Seasonal Staff			Close brush dump on Saturdays & by 3:30 on Tuesdays & Thursdays	\$ 5,925.00
Tax			For seasonal position	\$ 453.00
Other benefits	\$	550.00	Reduced meal allowance & shoe allowance from mechanic position	
Advertising	\$	5,500.00	Will take from Recycling revenue	
Equipment Rental	\$	2,000.00	Reduced	
Professional Development	\$	1,000.00	Reduced	
Contracted Services			Eliminated portable facilities & 2-way radio tower fees	\$ 26,500.00
Crystal Lake Cemeteries	\$	6,500.00	Eliminated mowing of CL Cemetery, Charter Cemetery & CL Fire House	
Uniforms & Clothing	\$	500.00	Reduced from Mechanic 1 elimination	
Technical Supplies - Street Signs	\$	5,000.00	Reduced, will increase next year	
Recreation Maintenance Supplies			Eliminated Fertilizer program, Park maintenance, court maintenance, playground maintenance.	\$ 55,000.00

Townwide Maintenance		Eliminated. Will request next year.	\$ 10,000.00
Ice melt for walks	\$ 1,500.00	Eliminated liquid program for stamped concrete	
Sanitary Landfill	\$ 44,000.00	Eliminated Bulky Waste program	
Total 400s	\$ 132,357.00		

<u>800s</u>			
WPCA Fees	\$ 14,640.00	Eliminated coverage of sewer fees for Snipsic Village	
Town Hall Fertilizer Program		Eliminated	\$ 2,100.00
Town Hall Building Repairs	\$ 4,000.00	Reduced	
Annex Building Maintenance	\$ 1,000.00	Reduced	
Annex Fertilizer Program		Eliminated	\$ 290.00
HML Fertilizer Program		Eliminated	\$ 1,650.00
HML Building Repairs	\$ 5,000.00	Reduced	
Human Services Fertilizer Program		Eliminated	\$ 150.00
Senior Center Fertilizer Program		Eliminated	\$ 1,725.00
Senior Center Equipment Repair	\$ 10,000.00	Reduced	
Senior Center Building Repair	\$ 5,000.00	Reduced	
Pinney House Electric		Eliminated	\$ 1,800.00
Total 800s	\$ 39,640.00		

Total Operating \$ **171,997.00**

Total DPW Cuts \$ **1,219,544.00**

Other Suggestions

Fire Dept	\$ 155,200.00	Eliminate new staff & equipment request
Fire Dept	\$ 29,700.00	Physicals and uniforms/equipment
Health Insurance	\$ 75,046.00	For fire staff above
Tax	\$ 11,873.00	For fire staff above
Deferred Comp	\$ 18,220.00	For fire staff above
Fire Dept Tires	\$ -	
Fire Dept. Custodial	\$ 3,090.00	DPW to absorb services at the two facilities

Police	\$ 25,000.00	Constable overnights
Tax	\$ 1,913.00	For constable above
Police	\$ 25,000.00	Trooper overnights
Police	\$ 67,037.00	Marine Patrol
Tax	\$ 5,128.00	For marine patrol

Park & Rec	\$ 86,039.00	Eliminate Life Guards
Tax	\$ 6,582.00	For lifeguards

Park & Rec	\$	5,003.00	Eliminate waterfront supplies	
Library Books (6370)	\$	40,000.00	Board of Trustees to determine, could include books, hours of service, staffing, etc.	\$ 41,800.00
Youth/Human Services			Eliminate Programs: 714, 718, 725,746	\$ 9,700.00
Senior Center	\$	22,880.00	Eliminate transportation dispatcher position	
Tax	\$	1,750.00	For dispatcher position	
Deferred comp	\$	2,686.00	For dispatcher position	
Lower Insurance Premium	\$	178,000.00	15% to 12.75% revised	
Unassigned Fund Balance	\$	-		
Total Town Operating Budgetary Cuts	\$	691,906.00		
Total CIP Cuts	\$	1,047,547.00		

Board of Education

Teacher Residency Program	\$	51,000	Elimination	
Weekly videos on Parent Square	\$	13,500	Elimination	
Summer curriculum work	\$	30,000	Reduction	
Audio visual	\$	10,000	Reduction	
Athletic travel	\$	10,000	Reduction	
Cost of preschool program	\$	10,000	Increase cost of program	
Staffing	\$	127,539	Reduction	
Total BOE Operating Budgetary Cuts	\$	252,039		
Total Budget Cuts	\$	1,991,492.00	1 Mill = approx. \$2,300,000	