



LOGAN JOHNSON
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

ELIZABETH NORD
Vice Chairmen

BOARD OF FINANCE

BUDGET DELIBERATIONS

April 16, 2026

MAURICE BLANCHETTE
DOUGLAS HARDING
DANIEL KEUNE
GOMATHI RAMACHANDRAN

Minutes

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

Others Present: : Matt Reed – Town Administrator, Laurie Burstein – First Selectman, Tiffany Pignataro – Finance Officer, Tom Modzelewski – DPW Director, Peter Hany – EVAC, Susan Philips – Library, Rebecca Stack – Human Services, Kristen Harp – Youth Services Director, Sheila Grady – Senior Center, Dustin Hugin – Rec Department, Craig Webb – EMS Director, Tim Seitz – CLFD, Cole Prato – EVFD, Arthur Biryukas – IT, Pete Hany – EVAC, Oliver Barton – Acting Superintendent, Robert Smith – EVFD, David Stavens – BOS, Miriam Underwood – Resident, John Turner – Resident, Lori Spielman – Resident, Tom Palshaw – Resident, Jo Lambert – Resident, Harry Lambert – Resident, Warren McGrath – Resident, Cathryn Couzens – Resident, John Kuehn – Resident. Others Present Via Zoom: Mary Cardin – BOS, Peg Busse – Library Board, Darcy M, Sam Saunders – DPW, Rebecca Einsiedel. Michael Vengruskas, Jenna Miller, Charlottee, Marge, Jim York – Building Official, Jennifer Dzen – Board of Education.

Call to Order

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

Pledge of Allegiance

Roll Call

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

Absent: Gomathi Ramachandran.

Public Comment

Peg Busse – 37 Abbott Road:

As a resident, she stated that if the Board of Finance believes this is the best budget for the town, they should defend it and actively advocate for its passage. As Chair of the Library Board, she

explained that they worked to develop a budget without a significant increase and are relying on the Friends of the Library to help cover a one-year shortfall.

Harry Lambert – 82 Middle Road:

Asked about the impact of the extra pay period in the upcoming budget, noting an increase of \$443,000. Mrs. Pignataro clarified that, while this increases total spending, it does not contribute to the tax increase. Mr. Lambert suggested making equivalent cuts this year.

Cathryn Couzens – 28 East Shore Road:

Stated that as a lake property owner, her taxes have increased, but she is willing to pay more to avoid cuts such as eliminating lifeguards or portable restrooms. She emphasized that the average savings of \$26 per month is not worth the loss of services.

Lori Spielman – 179 Abbott Road:

Asked whether there are any grants available for the fire truck, and if funds have been set aside to offset the cost. Mrs. Pignataro explained that there is a capital fund within the assigned fund balance for emergency capital expenses, but it is limited and must maintain a minimum level.

Jo Lambert – 82 Middle Road:

Expressed opposition to reductions in services such as lifeguards, portable restrooms, cemetery mowing, and closure of brush dumps, stating these cuts would not benefit the town.

John Kuehn – 17 Hillsdale Drive:

Warned that deferring maintenance will lead to higher costs in the future. He stated that saving \$26 now is not worth significantly larger expenses later.

Lori Spielman – 179 Abbott Road (additional comment):

Spoke about reducing fertilizer use on town fields, cautioning that neglect could lead to deterioration and fields becoming unusable. She suggested reducing but not eliminating maintenance.

Miriam Underwood – 15 Eva Circle:

Noted she has lived in Ellington for nearly 60 years and recalled past efforts to establish fire services. She emphasized the importance of maintaining adequate fire and police staffing, especially overnight, and stated these needs have been delayed too long.

Tom Palshaw – 120 Pinney Street:

Provided the Board with a list of proposed cuts totaling \$1.2 million.

John Turner – 29 Fairview Avenue:

Reiterated the importance of public safety, noting a 5% increase in service calls in the last year. He stressed the Board's responsibility to maintain the expected level of service as the town grows.

Laurie Burstein – First Selectman:

Emphasized the need to protect public safety and recognized the Department of Public Works for its ongoing efforts in maintaining the town.

Cathryn Couzins – 28 East Shore Road (Additional Comment):

Asked whether the proposed cuts would be reflected in the budget vote. She noted that budgets often fail on the first attempt and questioned the impact of cutting too much upfront.

Matt Reed – Town Administrator:

Read a letter submitted by Sorin Nicolescu of 21 Lake Street stating he has been a resident for 25 years and is finding himself unable to vote for this year's budget.

Michael Vengruskas – 14 Green Street:

Commented on increased property values and asked about tax collection rates. Mrs. Pignataro stated the town has collected nearly 99% of taxes.

Warren McGrath:

Stated that most speakers supported the original budget before the proposed cuts. He argued that delaying expenses increases future burdens and suggested presenting the budget without cuts to voters.

Budget Deliberations

Mr. Johnson asked Mr. Blanchette if he would like to move forward with the budget as is or if he had input on any of the proposed cuts. He thanked the Board of Education for submitting a bare-bones budget, noting that the problems would be much worse if they had not. He stated that we cannot expect to further deplete their budget and suggested putting the budget forward as is.

Mrs. Nord stated that she does not want to see cuts to children's programs or anything that would affect public safety. She emphasized that the town should continue to look well-maintained and stated she is leaning toward Mr. Blanchette's position of moving the budget forward. She added that she has a few questions.

Mr. Harding stated that he is leaning toward Mr. Blanchette's and Mrs. Nord's opinions on moving the budget forward.

Mr. Keune referenced an adjustment in insurance that Mrs. Pignataro had brought up. He stated that he does not want to vote on the list of cuts one item at a time. While he generally prefers to limit spending, he felt that many of the proposed cuts were deferrals that would make next year's situation worse. He referenced concerns raised about reducing fertilizer on fields, noting potential safety issues such as injuries. He suggested making manageable adjustments that are realistic and focusing on what it will take for voters to approve the budget.

Mr. Johnson asked Craig Webb, Emergency Management Director, to speak. Mr. Webb stated that there are ongoing challenges in recruiting volunteers for the fire and EVAC services. He noted that this exposes the town to risk and emphasized the need for paid firefighters as the town

continues to grow. Mr. Johnson asked whether the fire truck should be addressed in this budget. Mr. Webb stated that maintenance costs will continue to rise and suggested there may be opportunities for departments to share resources town-wide rather than purchasing a new apparatus immediately.

Chief Smith (EVFD) stated that while adjustments have already been made, the town needs to plan for the future. He said he would be comfortable delaying the fire truck replacement by one year, requesting \$30,000 for maintenance in the meantime, but emphasized that the truck will still need to be replaced. He reiterated that the most important priority is hiring paid fire staff.

Mr. Keune stated he would be open to leasing the fire truck. Mrs. Nord agreed that the truck could be removed from the budget and potentially voted on separately. Mrs. Pignataro noted that doing so would result in an automatic increase in next year's budget.

Mr. Johnson stated that there are significant expenses coming up, but that residents may be able to support the \$310,000 cost, allowing the town flexibility. He expressed a preference to keep the truck in the budget rather than pursue leasing. Mrs. Nord stated she supports keeping it in the capital budget unless the budget fails. Mr. Harding supported moving it to a lease agreement, while Mr. Blanchette opposed leasing - Fire truck remains in the capital budget.

Mr. Johnson then asked Mr. Webb to discuss the replacement ambulance. There was some support expressed by members, while Mr. Blanchette stated he does not support delaying replacement, noting the risks of keeping an older vehicle in service. Reduction accepted.

Mrs. Pignataro reviewed additional line items for the Board's consideration. The Board agreed to move forward with her recommendations.

Mr. Johnson asked Tom to speak about the plow truck. Tom explained that the town follows a 22-year replacement cycle for 11 plow trucks and emphasized the importance of maintaining a relatively new fleet to minimize downtime. He noted that truck prices have increased by 96% over the past 10 years and that costs are spread out over time. He also stated that assets have been sold and the revenue (\$58,000) used to offset the original request. All Board members agreed to the proposed reduction.

Mr. Johnson asked whether the \$8,500 for radios was critical. DPW indicated the radios are cumbersome and not frequently used, as communication is often done via personal phones. However, the Fire Chief explained that radios are essential during emergencies, such as major windstorms, when cell service may be unavailable. Mr. Johnson recommended keeping the radios.

Jennifer Dzen (Board of Education) presented a proposed reduction of \$74,500, including \$10,000 in audio/visual, \$13,500 in weekly video services, and \$51,000 from a teacher residency program. She noted that these reductions would not impact staffing and would come from operating, not capital. The Board thanked Mrs. Dzen for her work.

Mr. Johnson referenced Mr. Barton, who stated that while the NASA program is no longer a possibility for Ellington, upgrades to the high school auditorium would address issues such as screen size and sound quality, which are important for events and school productions.

Mr. Johnson asked if the Board supports funding paid firefighters. Mr. Harding asked whether a grant could be pursued. Mr. Webb explained that grants typically apply only to new positions not currently in place, so it would not impact this budget cycle, but could be an opportunity in the future. **All members supported keeping this item in the budget.**

Mr. Harding asked whether any adjustments were needed for the Board of Assessment Appeals. Mrs. Pignataro stated there is uncertainty regarding outcomes, but she is comfortable with the current budget figures. Tyler Devin, Assessor, stated that the current figures are appropriate for upcoming court cases.

Mrs. Nord asked for clarification regarding sewer coverage. The WPCA Administrator explained that the town has been subsidizing sewer usage for Snipsic Village and that eliminating the subsidy would shift costs to residents. Mr. Reed stated he met with the Housing Authority, which indicated they have limited flexibility due to rent restrictions. He suggested a gradual reduction rather than eliminating the subsidy. It was noted that the Board of Selectmen and Housing Authority could work together on a phased approach.

A brief recess was taken at **7:59 PM** for recalculation. The meeting resumed at **8:27 PM**.

The following motion was made.

**MOVED (NORD) SECONDED (BLANCHETTE) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO
REDUCE THE FOLLOWING BUDGET REVENUE ACCOUNTS**

CURRENT YEAR LEVY \$228,217

AMBULANCE FEE PROGRAM \$83,685;

APPROPRIATION-FUND BALANCE \$171,225;

MOVE TO INCREASE THE FOLLOWING BUDGET REVENUE ACCOUNTS

TELECOMMUNICATION REVENUE \$98,423

ADULT ED & VO-AG \$3,520

MOVE TO REDUCE THE FOLLOWING BUDGET EXPENDITURE ACCOUNTS

375-50108 EVAC ESIP \$8,000

950-50151 INSURANCE - ANTHEM BC/BS \$178,000

1301-60501 BOE EXPENDITURES \$74,500

CAPITAL NON-RECURRING FUND DUMP TRUCK \$58,000

CAPITAL NON-RECURRING FUND POLICE INTERCEPTOR \$80,000
CAPITAL NON-RECURRING FUND REPLACEMENT AMBULANCE \$83,685

FURTHER MOVE TO INCREASE THE FOLLOWING BUDGET EXPENDITURE ACCOUNTS
321-60243 WATER FIRE PROTECTION HYDRANTS \$88,800
370-60233 EVAC TRAINING \$8,000
410-50102 GENERAL TOWN ROADS OVERTIME \$4,201

FURTHER MOVED THAT THE SUM OF MONEY
RECOMMENDED FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026-27 IS 77,179,525
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: (SEE ATTACHED DOCUMENT).

Adjournment

MOVED (BLANCHETTE) SECONDED (NORD) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE
MEETING AT 8:39 PM.

Respectfully submitted:

Elizabeth Luginbuhl

Elizabeth Luginbuhl, Recording Secretary

MOVE TO REDUCE THE FOLLOWING BUDGET REVENUE ACCOUNTS

CURRENT YEAR LEVY \$228,217
AMBULANCE FEE PROGRAM \$83,685;
APPROPRIATION-FUND BALANCE \$171,225;

MOVE TO INCREASE THE FOLLOWING BUDGET REVENUE ACCOUNTS

TELECOMMUNICATION REVENUE \$98,423
ADULT ED & VO-AG \$3,520

MOVE TO REDUCE THE FOLLOWING BUDGET EXPENDITURE ACCOUNTS

375-50108 EVAC ESIP \$8,000
950-50151 INSURANCE - ANTHEM BC/BS \$178,000
1301-60501 BOE EXPENDITURES \$74,500
CAPITAL NON-RECURRING FUND DUMP TRUCK \$58,000
CAPITAL NON-RECURRING FUND POLICE INTERCEPTOR \$80,000
CAPITAL NON-RECURRING FUND REPLACEMENT AMBULANCE \$83,685

FURTHER MOVE TO INCREASE THE FOLLOWING BUDGET EXPENDITURE ACCOUNTS

321-60243 WATER FIRE PROTECTION HYDRANTS \$88,800
370-60233 EVAC TRAINING \$8,000
410-50102 GENERAL TOWN ROADS OVERTIME \$4,201

FURTHER MOVED THAT THE SUM OF MONEY
RECOMMENDED FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026-27 IS 77,179,525
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	2,531,268
BOARDS, AGENCIES, COMMISSIONS	129,970
PUBLIC SAFETY	4,190,569
PUBLIC WORKS	5,809,641
CULTURAL ARTS & RECREATION	915,069
LIBRARY	807,012
HUMAN SERVICES	1,039,612
TOWN PROPERTIES	640,190
DEBT SERVICE	3,971,960
FIXED CHARGES	4,294,026
MISCELLANEOUS	1,151,863
GENERAL GOVERNMENT TOTAL	25,481,180
CAPITAL OUTLAY	2,498,837
BOE	49,199,508
BUDGET GRAND TOTAL	77,179,525

FURTHER TO RECOMMEND TO A TOWN MEETING AN APPROPRIATION OF \$ 2,498,837
 FOR FISCAL YEAR 2026-27 FOR THE CAPITAL NON-RECURRING FUND
 SAID APPROPRIATION TO FUND THE FOLLOWING PROJECTS:

1100 CAPITAL NON-RECURRING FUND

<u>Project Requests</u>	2026-27 BUDGET REQUEST	ADDITIONS (REDUCTIONS)	2026-27 BOF RECOMMEND
Road Overlay	\$ 650,000	\$ -	\$ 650,000
Local Capital Improvement Program	165,800	-	165,800
Unimproved Road Improvement	75,000	-	75,000
Sidewalks	20,000	-	20,000
Culvert Maintenance & Repair	20,000	-	20,000
Rd Construction-Large/Small Bridges	20,000	-	20,000
DPW - Town Hall Addition/Renovation	40,000	-	40,000
DPW - DPW Building Maintenance	20,000	-	20,000
DPW - Library Updates	75,000	-	75,000
EVFD - Station 243 HVAC Replacement	20,000	-	20,000
DPW - Parking Lot Renovations	30,000	-	30,000
DPW - Tennis & Basketball Court Maintenance	25,000	-	25,000
DPW - High School Track	25,000	-	25,000
DPW - Guiderail Program	20,000	-	20,000
Assessor - Revaluation	57,000	-	57,000
BOE - Modern Classroom Furniture	30,000	-	30,000
BOE - BOE Computer Replacement Cycle	168,300	-	168,300
BOE - AV Upgrades	103,547	-	103,547
DPW - Snow Plow Dump trucks Replacement	290,000	(58,000)	232,000
DPW - Sidewalk Plow/Thro	80,000	-	80,000
DPW - Vacuum Trailer	36,000	-	36,000
DPW - Replacement Generator	65,000	-	65,000
EVAC - Spare Ambulance Equipment	132,000	(83,685)	48,315
BOE - Vehicle Replacement	30,000	-	30,000
Police - Interceptor SUVs	160,875	(80,000)	80,875
Police - Taser Replacement	52,000	-	52,000
EVFD - Light Rescue Truck	310,000	-	310,000
DEPARTMENT TOTAL	\$ 2,720,522	\$ (221,685)	\$ 2,498,837
LESS-FEDERAL/STATE/TRUST FUNDS			
Municipal Grants in Aid	\$ 223,527	\$ -	\$ 223,527
Ambulance Fee Fund	132,000	(83,685)	48,315
Town Road Aid	340,983	-	340,983
State Grant-LOCIP	165,800	-	165,800
TOTAL	\$ 862,310	\$ (83,685)	\$ 778,625
NET COST TO TOWN CAP NON REC FUND	\$ 1,858,212	\$ (138,000)	\$ 1,720,212