



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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LAURIE E. BURSTEIN
First Selectman

MARY B. CARDIN
Deputy First Selectman

JAMISON J. BOUCHER
JAMES M. PRICHARD
LORI L. SPIELMAN
SU THANVANTHRI
CHARLOTTE WARD

MATTHEW REED
Town Administrator

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

August 17, 2026

Nicholas J. DiCorleto, Jr. Meeting Hall and via ZOOM Conferencing

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

I. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Board of Selectmen (BOS) meeting was called to order at 6:36 pm. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. ROLL CALL

Selectmen Present: Laurie Burstein, Su Thanvanthri, James Prichard [arrived 6:41 pm], Mary Cardin, Charlotte Ward, Jamison Boucher

Town Staff Present: Matthew Reed, Town Administrator; *Mary Bartley, Director of Recreation

Elected Officials Present: Liz Nord, Vice Chair, Doug Harding, Maurice Blanchette, Dan Keune, Board of Finance; Peg Busse, Chair, Library Board of Trustees; Mike Swanson, Subhra Roy, Planning and Zoning Commission; *Miriam Underwood, Vice Chair, *David Stavens, Board of Education

Emergency Service Agency Representatives Present: Alisa Smith, Lieutenant/Scheduler, Ellington Volunteer Ambulance Corps; Bob Smith, Ellington Volunteer Fire Department

*Attended via Zoom

III. PUBLIC COMMENT [*Not to exceed 30 minutes unless extended by majority vote of the BOS*]

Juliet D'Antonio, 24 Buff Cap Road, said that Lori Spielman served as First Selectman for many years and did very well, and to not approve her to fill the vacancy would say a lot and would be unfair; she can offer good advice and knows Ellington very well. First Selectman Burstein expressed that she is not sure where this misinformation is coming from, as no vote on this appointment has been taken; the BOS called this special meeting for when the vacancy existed.

Ms. Busse noted that in the past, statements made under Public Comment have been limited to items not on the agenda; First Selectman Burstein stated that she is comfortable with letting people speak on this.

Wil Duchesneau, 200 West Road/Ellington Democratic Town Committee (EDTC) Chair, commented on a post he had seen on an Ellington Republican Town Committee (ERTC) page that said the following:

"Tonight, August, 17, 2026, there is a special Board of Selectmen meeting to discuss and fill the Republican vacancy on the Board of Selectmen. This meeting is because the democrats on the Board of Selectmen refused to vote on Lori Spielman's nomination at their regular meeting last week. The meeting is at 6:30pm at the Ellington Town Hall for anyone interested in attending." Mr. Duchesneau noted that Lori Spielman's name was not even mentioned at the regular meeting last week and that there was no vacancy at that time to fill. He shared that it was upsetting to him that things were being posted that didn't seem factual.

Mr. Boucher commented that there shouldn't be back and forth discussion between citizens in the audience, noting that any statements should be directed to the BOS.

Doug Harding, 22 Cherrywood Drive/ERTC Chair, noted that past practice with elective appointments has been to include an effective date in the appointment motions. Ms. Ward asked for some clarification on his statement; Mr. Harding explained that at the June 8, 2026 BOS meeting, when the resignation of Jen Dzen was accepted and Steven Viens was appointed to fill that vacancy, a future effective date was included in both motions. Ms. Thanvanthri stated that the way she understood it is that it is fine for the BOS to vote for future appointments on other boards since all of the votes would still be effective at that time; in this situation, Mr. Stavens would have voted on a future action that would have taken effect once he was no longer a member of the BOS. Mr. Boucher noted that the Town Charter does not prevent that from occurring.

Ms. Cardin recommended that comments be related to the items on this agenda.

Mr. Swanson asked what this special meeting was costing the Town. First Selectman Burstein stated that the BOS was trying to follow the rules and make this a clean transaction, adding that it is not unusual for the BOS to call special meetings. Mr. Swanson said that as a taxpayer and in the interest of transparency, he would like the cost of holding this special meeting to be made known.

Melinda Ferry, 3 Jonathan Drive, asked if there would be time for further questions and comments later on in the meeting, which was confirmed.

Ethan Biggs, 1 Abbott Road/ERTC Vice Chair, said that there is a lot of noise at the national and state level about politics, and what he and his peers care about is what the BOS is doing to make Ellington better; he stated that this shouldn't be a political issue, and the BOS members should fulfil their promise to make Ellington the best it can be.

Liz Nord, 5 Geraldine Drive S, stated that the point of this meeting is being missed and that the Charter indicates that a vacancy can only be filled once it exists; if it was done a certain way in the past, it doesn't need to continue in that manner. The object of this special meeting is to handle the appointment at the proper time according to the Charter.

IV. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

A. Board of Selectmen Membership – Elected Position

1. ERTC Recommendation to Fill Vacancy

First Selectman Burstein agreed with Mr. Biggs's earlier sentiment, which is why she was disappointed that the ERTC was saying that the BOS was trying to squash this vote; she stated that the BOS is trying to do what's in the best interest of the Town and that they should all work together, since the taxpayers deserve that. She suggested that everyone be more aware of what messages are being put out moving forward, emphasizing the importance of being as honest and understanding as possible.

Ms. Ferry shared that she was a member of the BOS for ten years and witnessed the close connections that Ms. Spielman had with her staff and the Town Administrator. She feels that if she is appointed to the BOS, this would likely result in undue influence; the voters have chosen Democratic representation and that choice should be honored, and if Ms. Spielman wants to be on the BOS, she should be elected. Ms. Ferry noted that the current policy is that the losing First Selectman candidate is not placed on the BOS.

Christina Keune, 335 Somers Road, asked which policy Ms. Ferry was referring to; Ms. Cardin noted that this was in Section 302 of the Town Charter which is available on the website.

Ethan Biggs shared his feeling that Ms. Ferry's stance feels hypocritical if this isn't a political issue.

Subhra Roy, 2 Samantha Court, said that Ms. Spielman was a phenomenal First Selectman for ten years and did a lot for the Town, but asked if this appointment would be reversing an election result that was not on her side.

Peg Busse, 37 Abbott Road, noted that while she is a Democrat, she does not agree with what is being said. The Charter states that if an individual loses the First Selectman race, they cannot bump a duly elected member of the BOS; however, this situation involves replacing an individual who has resigned, which is a different scenario. Mr. Boucher agreed, reiterating that the Charter does not say that the losing First Selectman candidate cannot be a member of the BOS.

Mr. Prichard shared that he has been a member of the BOS for twenty-one years and has never seen an individual nominated to fill an elected vacancy treated like this and he has never seen it be voted down; First Selectman Burstein reminded him that a vote has not yet been taken.

Ms. Thanvanthri shared that she has been thinking about what her responsibility is as a member of the BOS, and while she has had nothing but friendly interactions with Ms. Spielman and thanks her for her past service, the voters chose a change of leadership in the past election and she feels that this ERTC recommendation undercuts the voters' decision; she can't in good conscience support this. Mr. Prichard again stated that in his many years on the BOS, he has never seen this behavior before, and the BOS has always accepted either party's nomination.

Ms. Keune noted that there is no subterfuge at play with this nomination; the Republicans have two total position on the BOS and the ERTC is just trying to fill this spot, and it should not matter that the candidate was previously First Selectman.

Ms. Cardin said that this is a difficult decision that she has been thinking about a lot. She noted that her choices are not governed by the political party that she belongs to, but she reads the Charter provision that has been discussed differently than others. The provision, which was changed in 2018, states that the votes cast for the unsuccessful First Selectman candidate should not be counted towards a spot on the BOS. Many voters from all parties have reached out with concerns, and she feels this violates the spirit of the Charter. She was surprised that the ERTC couldn't come up with another recommendation for this vacancy. The Townspeople voted for Mr. Stavens to be a member of the BOS, and months after that vote he is moving to the BOE; he could have run for that seat. She also stated that she agrees wholeheartedly with First Selectman Burstein that the job of the BOS is to work together.

Ms. Ward also shared that she has given this a lot of thought. She personally worked with Ms. Spielman and had nothing but a positive experience with her, but she has to consider all sides to ensure that she is appropriately representing the residents, who were asking the reason behind this Charter change.

Mr. Boucher reminded everyone that there is nothing in the Charter that restricts Ms. Spielman from serving on the BOS, adding that First Selectman and Selectman are two different positions. He feels that it would be very small-minded to not appoint this nomination from the ERTC and that specifying who they should or should not put up for a nomination is wildly inappropriate; no one should be telling the other party what to do. If the nominee is capable and has the experience to do the job, it should be a simple vote, and anything other than making this appointment is small-minded.

Rochelle Malone, 13 Sprucewood Drive, shared that while she has not been involved in Town business in the past, she feels that Ms. Spielman was voted out in a political move. When she reached out to Ms. Spielman with a question in the past, she was very responsive to her, and Ms. Malone stated that not appointing someone who wants to work hard for everybody in Town would be a loss.

Dan Keune, 335 Somers Road, noted that appointing Ms. Spielman would not change the balance or leadership of the BOS, so to say that this decision would change what the voters wanted is incorrect. The Democrats will still be the majority party and they could have looked at this situation differently; Ms. Spielman would be an asset to the BOS, and if they disagree with her on any decisions, they can outvote her. Ms. Cardin reminded everyone that the vote has not happened, and some comments that are being made are assumptive. She asked Mr. Keune that if the Democratic candidate for First Selectman lost in the next election, and a month later there was an opening on the BOS, would he be in favor of seating that individual who lost the First Selectman race? He said that he would have no problem with that, adding that the voters did not choose to not have Ms. Spielman involved with the BOS at all. The parties should both be trusted to determine the most worthy person for the seat.

Mr. Swanson noted that when Ms. Spielman ran for First Selectman, she didn't have the option to also run for the BOS, adding that she lost by fewer than 200 votes. He emphasized the importance of putting the best person forward for these positions and asked why the BOS would not want the second best overall candidate on this Board when she would do good for the Town, as she brings a lot of knowledge and background with her; he stated that it would be a shame if she was not appointed.

Ms. Ward asked if it would be appropriate to ask Ms. Spielman if she had any comments; First Selectman Burstein stated that if she wanted to share, she was welcome to.

Ms. Spielman stated that she wants to be on the BOS because she has a lot of history and wants the Town to go in the right direction, and she wants to help in any way that she can.

Kathy Heminway, 179 Abbott Road, thinks that Ms. Spielman would be a benefit to the BOS because of her background and her passion for Ellington, adding that she brings common sense, practicality, and support for what the BOS is already doing.

Mr. Biggs reflected back to 2020, noting that when COVID-19 hit, everyone looked to Ms. Spielman for direction and she led the Town through the pandemic. He wants everyone to look at the facts; Ms. Spielman served this Town for years and is a player the BOS should want on the team. If there is conflict, the BOS should work through it and demonstrate leadership in working together and collaborating, as that is what Ellington is about. He urged the BOS to put this to a vote and move forward.

MOVED (CARDIN), SECONDED (PRICHARD) AND PASSED [AYE: BOUCHER/WARD/BURSTEIN/PRICHARD; NAY: CARDIN/THANVANTHRI] TO APPOINT LORI SPIELMAN TO COMPLETE AN UNEXPIRED TERM ON THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN ENDING DECEMBER 6, 2027, CREATED BY THE RESIGNATION OF DAVID STAVENS AND AS RECOMMENDED BY THE ELLINGTON REPUBLICAN TOWN COMMITTEE.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. Board of Selectmen Committee, Liaison, and Representative Assignments

MOVED (CARDIN), SECONDED (THANVANTHRI) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO TABLE THE APPROVAL OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN COMMITTEE, LIAISON, AND REPRESENTATIVE ASSIGNMENTS.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

MOVED (CARDIN), SECONDED (PRICHARD) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN AT 7:28 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Julia Merriam

Julia Merriam, Recording Secretary

Laurie Burstein

Laurie Burstein, First Selectman