



TOWN OF LEDYARD
CONNECTICUT
TOWN COUNCIL

Chairman S. Naomi Rodriguez

**MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING
LEDYARD TOWN COUNCIL
HYBRID FORMAT
COUNCIL CHAMBERS, TOWN HALL ANNEX
741 COLONEL LEDYARD HIGHWAY, LEDYARD, CONNECTICUT
REMOTE MEETING VIA ZOOM**

PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES

7:00 P.M., APRIL 15, 2024

- I. **CALL TO ORDER** – The Public Hearing regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget was called to order by Town Council Chairman Rodriguez at 7:00 p.m.

Chairman Rodriguez welcomed all to the Hybrid Meeting and she noted that the remote meeting information for the Town Council, Board of Education and members of the Public to participate in this evening's public hearing was available on the Agenda that was posted on the Town's Website – Granicus- Legistar Meeting Portal.

- II. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

- III. **PROCEDURE OF THE HEARING**

Chairman Rodrigeuz announced the procedure of the Public Hearing. She noted tonight's Public Hearing was a hybrid format noting that residents could attend in-person or remotely via the Zoom video conference. She asked those attending via video conference to mute their devices until they wanted to address the meeting.

Chairman Rodriguez stated they would begin the Public Hearing with budget presentations from Town Council Finance Committee Chairman Tony Saccone and Board of Education Finance Committee Chairman Joanne Kelley. She stated a Public Comment period would follow.

- III. **CALL OF THE PUBLIC HEARING**

Administrative Assistant Roxanne Maher read the call of the meeting as follows:

**LEGAL NOTICE
TOWN OF LEDYARD**

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The Ledyard Town Council will conduct a Public Hearing
at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, April 15, 2024
to receive comments/recommendations regarding a
Proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget.

This Public Hearing will be Hybrid Format

Please join the Public Hearing in-person or
remotely from your computer, tablet, or smartphone as follows:

In-person attendance will be at the
Council Chambers, Town Hall Annex Building
741 Colonel Ledyard Highway, Ledyard, Connecticut.

Remote Attendance: Via Zoom Video Conference at:
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/82925421045?pwd=NYJ3ZCjVw10TjNtDr8AUVb0vydamr4.1>
or by audio only telephone +1 646 558 8656; Meeting ID: 829 2542 1045; Passcode: 246596

Interested persons may submit
written communications to towncouncil@ledyardct.org

Copies of the proposed Budget will be available on April 9, 2024 in the
Town Clerks' Office and on the town's website at: <https://www.ledyardct.org/proposed-annual-budget>

For the Ledyard Town Council
s/s S. Naomi Rodriguez, Chairman

Please Publish on: Friday, April 5, 2024

IV. PRESENTATION OF THE PROPOSED FISCAL YEAR 2023/2024 BUDGET

Town Council Finance Committee Chairman Tony Saccone welcomed all those who were attending tonight's Public Hearing both in-person and by video conference. He noted that this was his first Budget Public Hearing Presentation.

Councilor Saccone provided a brief overview of the Annual Budget Process noting the Mayor submitted his proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget to the Town Council on March 4, 2024 (first Monday in March) in accordance with the Chapter VII; Section 4, of the Town Charter. He went on to note the Finance Committee held three Budget Work Sessions meeting with the Mayor and Department Heads on March 7, 11, & 14, 2024. At their Special Meeting held on March 25, 2024 the Finance Committee approved to forward the proposed budget for Town Council approval at their March 27, 2024 meeting to present at tonight's Public Hearing. He noted after tonight's Public Hearing the Finance Committee would have the opportunity to make additional budget adjustments at their Regular Meeting scheduled for April 17, 2024 to consider any new information that has come in, before forwarding the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget to the Town Council for their final approval to be presented at the Annual Town Meeting scheduled for May 20, 2024 that would adjourn to a vote on the machines on Tuesday, May 21, 2024.

Councilor Saccone stated in submitting his proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget to the Town Council Mayor Allyn, III, noted the following:

- Grand List for the 2023 Valuation yielded a net increase of 4.5% compared to last year's overall increase in the value of 1.3%.
- 95% of Ledyard's Tax Revenue comes from residential property taxes.
- Budget Revenues from Grand Lists for most of the comparable towns to Ledyard in the area were two to three times higher than Ledyard. Ledyard has historically been the leader in the area for having a heavy reliance on residential property taxes, with 95% of Ledyard's Tax Revenue coming from residential property taxes.
- Debt Service decreased by \$448,820 compared to last year's decrease of \$350,810.
- As of June 30, 2023 Ledyard's Pension Liability was funded at 84%; compared to last year which was 80% as of June 30, 2023. The increase was attributed to sound management and favorable market conditions. Ledyard was still one of the ten best funded pension liabilities in the state.

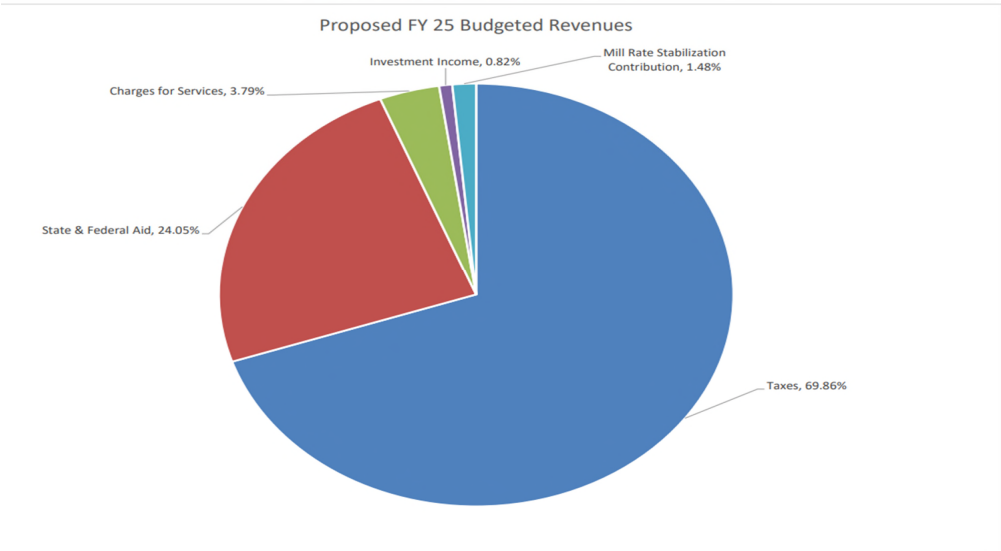
Councilor Saccone proceeded to provide an overview of the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget in the amount of \$67,430,573 which included a \$2,889,633 increase; or 4.48% over the current year's budget; calling for an estimated .65 mil increase for a projected mil rate of 35.21. He stated the budget was comprised of a General Government Budget of \$29,060,750 an increase of \$428,178 or 1.50% and a Board of Education Budget of \$38,369,823 an increase of \$2,461,455 or 6.85% higher than the current fiscal year (23/24) budget. He stated the proposed budget was responsible and resourceful, noting that there were few new opportunities for continued consolidations and savings.

Councilor Saccone provided an overview of the Revenues noting with the 2023 property revaluation Ledyard saw an increase of \$54,308,514 or 4.50% in the Grand List (total net Grand List \$1,317,930,660. In the coming year, revenue were as follows: Taxes 69.2%; State and Federal Aid: 24.05%; Charges for Services: 3.79%, Investment on Income; 0.82%; Mil Rate Stabilization contribution: 1.48%.

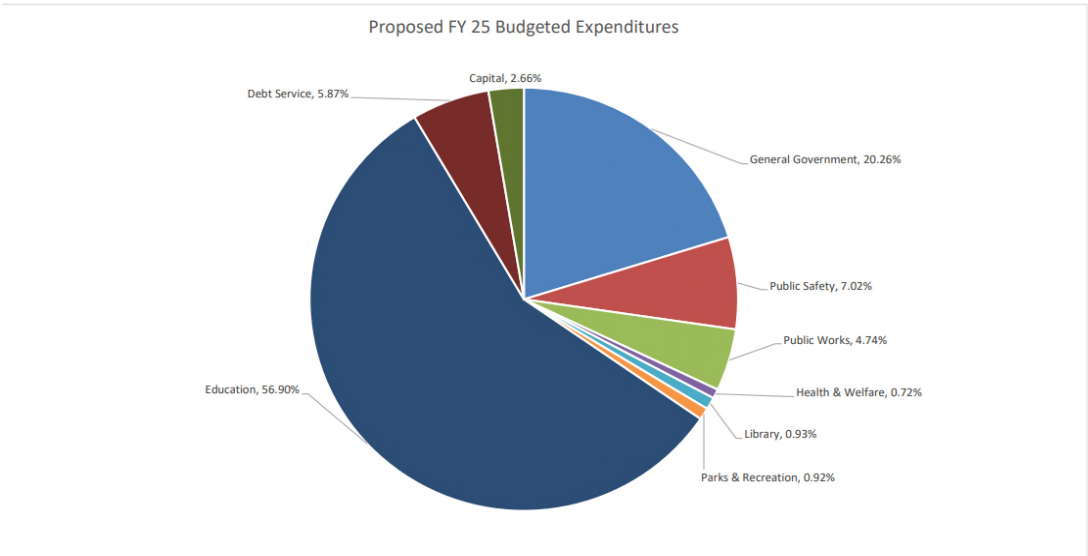
Councilor Saccone stated that they expect income from non-tax sources to increase by 0.4% He noted Ledyard anticipated Education Cost Sharing (ECS) from the State would remain flat, and that there continued to be concerns over the funding methodology for Special Education (SPED). He also stated that Ledyard should continue to see the same level of funding from the State in areas such as Town Aid Road (TAR) and Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT).

Councilor Saccone stated Finance Director Matthew Bonin worked with the Bank to earn a higher interest yield on the towns funds. He stated the projected interest earned revenue for the year would be more than \$400,000.

Councilor Saccone presented the Revenues by Source as shown in the pie chart below:



Councilor Saccone provided an overview the Budget Expenditures by function noting the General Government Budget in the amount of \$29,060,750 included approximately \$8,828,158 of Board of Education related expenses comprised of liability insurance, health care, workers compensation, retirement obligations, and other in-kind services. 56.90% of the total budget was allocated for Board of Education expenses, 0.72% was allocated for Health and Welfare, 5.8% was allocated for Debt Service, 2.66% was allocated for Capital, and 20.26% was allocated for General Government expenses as shown in the pie chart below:

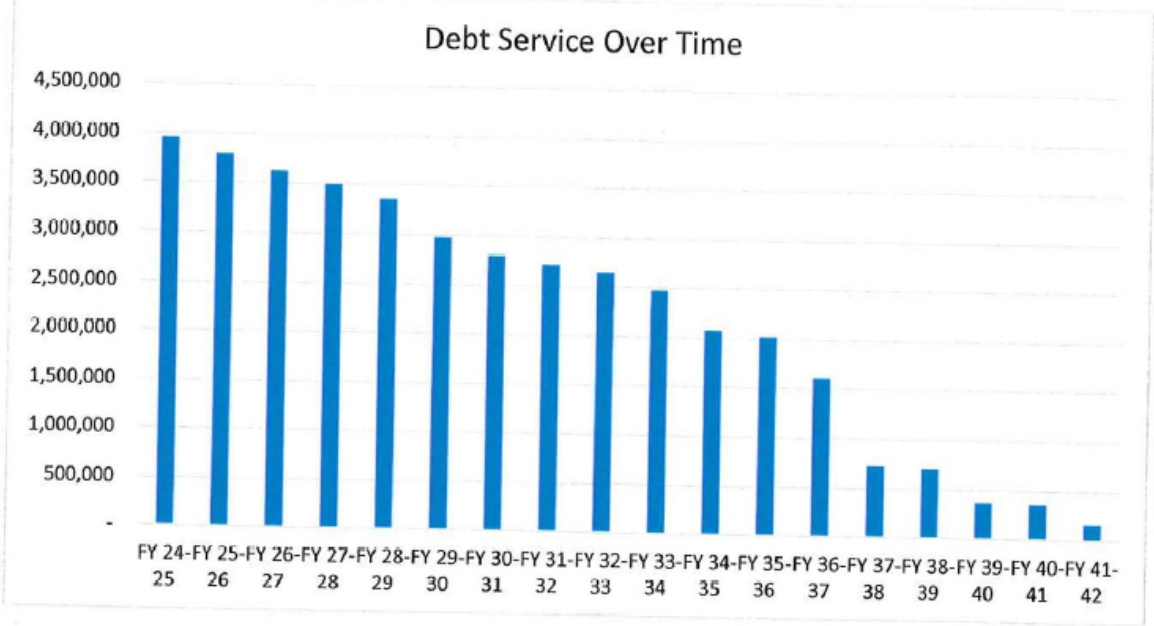


Councilor Saccone provided an overview of the town’s Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) noting the General Government budget allocates \$1,791,098 in tax levy for the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). This funding, combined with state and federal grants, and other sources provides for a total CIP in the amount of \$7,841,564. The CIP continues to fund critical road

repairs/maintenance, purchase of emergency radio equipment, and reserve fund allocations for emergency services equipment, future vehicle purchases, technology updates, improvements to the High School classrooms and bathrooms, Lantern Hill Road Bridge repairs, roof replacement for the Board of Education Central Office, the Gales Ferry School and Juliet W. Long School, including the installation of roof mounted solar array systems, Town Green, Multi-modal Pathway from the High School to Ledyard Center; and sewer line from Ledyard Center to the Waste Water Treatment Facility.

	Council Proposed	Council Proposed	Council Proposed	Council Proposed
Description	Tax Levy	from Grants	Other	Total
Capital Improvement Plan 2023/2024	1,653,735	2,836,438	795,250	5,285,423
Capital Improvement Plan 2024/2025	1,791,098	5,568,087	482,379	7,841,564
Capital Improvement Plan Change	137,363	2,731,649	(312,871)	2,556,141

Councilor Saccone noted the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 included \$3,955,030 for Debt Service, a decrease in the amount of \$448,820 continuing the payment of bonds for the police headquarters, school renovation projects, as well as school roofs, Building Management Systems (BMS) and HVAC Systems.



Councilor Saccone reviewed the status of the capital projects the Town has been working on this year, noting that the construction work on some of these projects such as the Multi-Use Pathway from Ledyard Center to the High School; and the Sewer Line Extension Project would continue into the coming year as follows:

- Ledyard Community Town Green and Parklet– Upper and Lower Town Green as well as the Pole Barn improvements work has been completed and included new electrical wiring and power supply to all facilities, lights, and poured concrete floor. Nearly all of the work has been completed by Public Works employees.





West Entrance to Upper Town Green



North Entrance to Upper Town Green

- Ledyard Town Green
 - New electrical wiring and power supply to all facilities (complete)
 - Upgrades to Morgan Barn for conversion to Food Pantry (complete)
 - Parking area for events using reclaimed millings (complete)
 - New lighting (complete)
 - Parklet for events (complete)
 - Pole Barn renovation (complete)
 - Nearly all work completed by Public Works employees
- Bill Library and Town Hall Buildings roof replacement (complete)
- Multi-modal Pathway Trail Ledyard Center to the High School (in process)
- Sewer Line Ledyard Center to Treatment Facility (in process)
- GFS & JWL roof replacement and solar projects (in process)



Bill Library Roof &
Beautification Committee
Daffodils



Concrete Floor Pole Barn
Lower Town Green



New Roof
Linda C. Davis Food Pantry

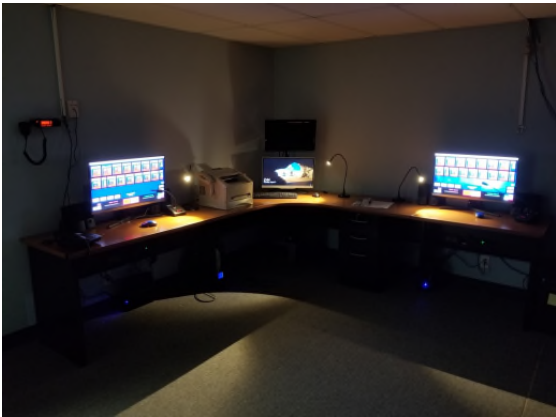
American Rescue Act Funding (ARPA) \$4,327,000

Councilor Saccone went on to explain as part of this year’s annual budget preparation the Finance Committee continued to spend many hours reviewing the status of the projects that were approved at the Fiscal Year 2022/2023 Budget Referendum for the use of the \$4,327,000 Federal American Rescue Act Funding (ARPA) Ledyard received. The federal guidelines require the ARPA funding to be obligated by the end of the 2024 calendar year; and spent (liquidated) by the end of the 2026 calendar year. The town has made good progress with twenty-three projects being completed to date, eight projects were in-progress, and eight projects have not been started. The projects that made the ARPA List ranged from infrastructure projects such as the Ledyard Center Sewer Line Extension project to supporting our Regional Agency Partners, to facility maintenance projects, preservation of historical landmarks and park improvements, software upgrades and many others.

The following ARPA Funded Projects have been completed:

Playscape Replacement Winthrop Rd Gales Ferry	50,111
Replace 2 Dispatch Stations in Emergency Ops Center	60,487
Concrete Floor - Pole Barn	100,000
Replace Food Pantry Roof	8,700
TVCCA - Commissary project	15,000
Automatic doors, Senior Center	4,972
HVAC Emergency Services Building	204,023
Town Hall HVAC system replacement	80,072
Replace brackets on streetlight poles	2,520
Install WI-FI in Food Pantry	2,641
LED Sign Gales Ferry Fire Station	26,443

Skid mounted sewer pump	193,816
Park Rec HVAC	15, 2382
Sandy Hollow guard rails	330,00



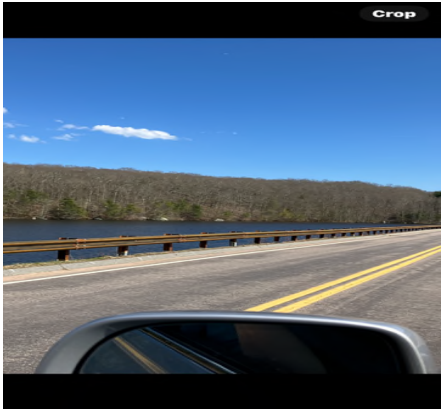
Dispatch Stations Emergency Operations Center (EOC)



New Skid Mounted Sewer Pumps
Wastewater Treatment Facility



New Playscapes – 13 Winthrop



Sandy Hollow Road Guiderails Replacement



Town Hall HV/AC System Replacement

The following ARPA Projects were in progress:

Sewer Line Extension Phase I	1,110,000
Funding for youth mental health clinicians	190,000
Vinyl siding food pantry	17,500
Ledyard Up/Down Sawmill	69,425
Housing Rehab Grant - additional funding	100,000
Nathan Lester House repairs	95,575
Muti-use Pathway Administration Engineering	90,000
LED Sign Panel, Ledyard Center	35,000

The following ARPA Projects have not been started:

Sewer Line Extension Phase III	950,000
Erickson Park Enhancements	55,000
Sidewalk Infill in Ledyard Center	35,000
Exterior Doors (TH and Annex) w/ Electronic Locking Systems	23,000
Electric Vehicle charging stations	20,000
Gales Ferry Corridor Study	50,000

Councilor Saccone addressed the projected 35.21 mil rate to support the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget as presented this evening in the amount of \$67,430,573.

Councilor Saccone noted the proposed 0.65 mil increase would increase property owners tax bill as follows:

House Assessed Value	Annual Tax Bill Increase
\$250,000	\$162.50
\$350,000	\$227.50
\$450,000	\$292.50

Councilor Saccone noted the following options to try to minimize the increase in the projected/proposed Mil Rate:

- Cut spending further
- Apply for more Grants

Councilor Saccone continued by explaining in the upcoming fiscal year the State would be considering the following Bills:

- Discontinue personal property tax on cars.
- Taxation on Indian Lands – Councilor Saccone stated Legislative efforts continue to be discussed that would prevent towns from taxing private companies operating on tribal lands. He stated there was a piece of Legislation that did not pass last year; explaining that during this past year a Working Group studied the issue.

Councilor Saccone provided a recap noting the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget in the amount of \$67,430,573 represented a 4.48% increase over the current year’s budget (fy 23/24) and would require a mil increase in the amount of 0.65 mils or a proposed Mill Rate of 35.21 to support the budget.

Councilor Saccone concluded by stating the Town Council was interested in hearing residents comments and suggestions regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget.

Councilor Saccone deferred to Board of Education Finance Committee Chairman Joanne Kelly to present the education budget for the upcoming year.

Board of Education Proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget \$38,369,823

Board of Education Finance Committee Chairman Joanne Kelley thanked Superintendent of Schools Jason Hartling, the Administration, Staff, and the Board of Education for their hard work on preparing the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. She stated that she reviewed a PowerPoint presentation of the Board of Education's proposed budget at the Town Council's February 28, 2024 meeting. She stated rather than review the Presentation again this evening that she was going to talk about the Board of Education's budget process and proposed Fiscal Year Budget.

Ms. Kelley stated on February 15, 2024 the Ledyard Board of Education unanimously approved it's 2024-2025 Fiscal Year Budget in the amount of \$38,369,823; and on March 27, 2024 the Ledyard Town Council voted unanimously to approve the Board of Education's adopted Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget in the amount of \$38,369,823.

Ms. Kelley stated the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget in the amount of \$38,369,823 represented an increase of 6.85% over the current Year's budget (fy 23/24). She stated approximately 90% of the increase was the result of significant inflationary increases in energy costs and transportation cost noting that this year was a renewal year for both contracts, as well as State Mandates for curriculum and HVAC inspections, and other contractual obligations.

Ms. Kelley noted as stated in previous years the *"demand for programming, interventions and other supports will not soon disappear"*. She stated that they continue to see an increased need for special services and social emotional skill development in Ledyard's students. She stated although enrollment remained level, the number of students needing support was steadily growing. She stated the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget would provide funding to respond to those increases to meet our obligations to those students.

Ms. Kelley continued by stating the proposed Education Budget would also provide for critical resources to meet the need for targeted interventions in literacy and numeracy for those students who struggle to meet grade level learning expectations. She explained after multiple years of small, incremental additions of staff and curriculum enhancements across the School District the Board of Education believed the additions that were included in the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget would make meaningful progress toward their goal to help all students reach their highest potential.

Ms. Kelley stated equal importance, that a critical priority for the upcoming budget was to address the mental health crisis occurring in Ledyard's student population. She stated this was not a Ledyard problem, and it was not a single issue, explaining that it was a significant obstacle to learning and teaching in the classroom. She stated as with the academic interventions Ledyard has been working to evolve in how those needs were addressed and that their District has built a mental health team consisting of social workers and school psychologists in each building. The addition of a Clinical Supervisor for Mental Health Services, who would support the development of treatment plans for identified students, problem solving solutions to the implementation of those plans, and monitoring clinical progress, would finally secure the District with a cohesive, well-defined system of clinical supports that does not currently exist within the local health-care system in an equitable way.

Ms. Kelley stated that the Board of Education was finally responding to requests by teachers to raise Substitute Teacher pay to be more in-line with other school districts with the goal of hiring more substitute teachers to cover a goal of 10% more absences. She stated the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Education Budget would raise Substitute Teachers pay from \$100 per day to \$125 per day, which was the average for the area.

Ms. Kelley stated the Town of Ledyard was funding their Education at a cost that was far below any other school district in Southeastern Connecticut, noting that Ledyard's Per Pupil Expenditure was among the lowest 10% in the State of Connecticut. She stated despite these funding challenges the Board of Education always looks for efficiencies, innovation, and ways to channel resources into the classroom to elevate the educational programming while being good stewards of the funds allocated by the Town. She stated after months of discussing the long and short-range planning needs the Board realized that the School District has exhausted all their ability to *"Rob Peter to pay Paul"* to mitigate the essential needs of our students.

Ms. Kelley stated as a community we have a moral and legal obligation to provide the appropriate education to each student. She stated Ledyard had every right to expect that this was done to the best of our ability and the Board believed that by accomplishing this we would fulfill the vision that the larger Community has for Ledyard Public Schools.

V. PUBLIC COMMENTS –

Chairman Rodriguez thanked Mr. Saccone and Ms. Kelley for their informative presentations, and she opened the floor for in-person public comments. She asked residents to keep their comments to three-minutes.

Those attending the Public Hearing via video conference were asked to type their name and address in the “Chat Box” if they would like to provide public comments.

Mr. Whit Irwin, 2 Winfield Way, Ledyard, stated in listening to the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget presentations from the Town Council and the Board of Education, he noticed that neither of the budgets were what the Town’s experienced Administrators proposed. He expressed concern stating with less than six-months of municipal experience they were looking to add \$300,000 on top of their constituents who have been dealing with high inflation just to pay electric bills, etc. He questioned what their elected officials were planning to spend the additional \$300,000 on, noting that he thought the Town Council and Board of Education were supposed to be good stewards of their taxpayers dollars. He stated he was disappointed that the budget presentations did not address the reasons their elected officials increased the Administrator’s Budget requests by \$300,000, noting that Ledyard had skilled, consummate, professional Administrators who had many years of experience. He stated until the Town Council and Board of Education addressed how the additional \$300,000 was going to be used, that he planned to vote “No” on the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget.

Councilor Ryan noted that he wanted to clarify a statement that was made during the Board of Education’s presentation. He noted that Ms. Kelley stated “....the Ledyard Town Council voted unanimously to approve the Board of Education’s adopted Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget in the amount of \$38,369,823”. Councilor Ryan stated the Town Council did not unanimously pass the Budget. He stated there were three members of the Town Council that were absent. Chairman Rodriguez stated the vote was unanimous by the members of the Town Council that did show up that day. Chairman Ryan stated there were three Town Councilors that were absent that day. Chairman Rodriguez called a Point of Order, and asked that the next resident be allowed to speak.

Mr. Daniel Pealer, 48 Highland Drive, Ledyard, stated he has been a Ledyard resident for nearly all of his life, and that he has reached a time when he was looking to buy his first house. He urged everyone to vote against the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget, because it would place those like himself even further from being able to afford a house in this great town. He stated the proposed Budget would increase the Mil Rate from 34.56 to 35.21 noting that those who support the increase have stated that this would be a \$10 per month housing tax increase for a home with a \$200,000 tax assessment. However, he stated that this explanation minimized the jump in the annual property taxes that would be due from \$6,912 to \$7,042. He asked that they keep this in mind, noting that someone in his position would be using their entire lifesavings to put 20% down to purchase a home. He stated Ledyard already ranked in the top 25% highest mil rates in the State of Connecticut. He stated the towns of Ellington, Wolcott, Suffield, Colchester, Plainfield, Tolland, Cromwell, and Orange all have a similar size population to Ledyard. He stated out of all these towns that only Tolland had a higher mil rate at 37.33 which was 2.77 mils higher than Ledyard. He stated the other town’s mil rates averaged 5.77 mils lower than Ledyard’s mil rate, with Plainfield doing the best with a mil rate of 20.79. He stated based on their hypothetical house with an assessed value of \$200,000 the yearly taxes in Plainfield would be \$4,158 compared to Ledyard’s \$7,042. He stated among area towns which included the following: Norwich, New London, North Stonington, Montville, Preston, Groton, Waterford, and Stonington that only two had a higher mil rate. He stated those were Norwich and New London who both also had a higher population than Ledyard, noting that Ledyard was the third least populated town in the region. He stated that he recognized the problems that were thrust upon Ledyard by the State such as unfunded and underfunded mandates; however, he questioned: (1) What other towns doing; or not doing that allowed them to operate a much lower mil rate; (2) What these other towns had that Ledyard did not have that could help us; and (3) What was Ledyard doing that was not needed. He asked residents to vote against the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget, noting they were driving young people and families away.

Ms. Wendy Hellekson, 14-L Lakeside Drive, Ledyard, stated that she was in-favor of the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. She stated that she lived and worked in town. She stated that she knew how hard the people in Ledyard worked to provide for their families; and that she also understood that times were tough, noting that the reasons times were tough were not because of fiscal mismanagement by the town. She stated it was a much larger problem that was beyond anything that those attending tonight’s Public Hearing could do. However, she stated that this did not mitigate that they still needed services and things to keep the town running and to keep it a place where people were going to live. She stated if they do not keep up with inflation that they would be left with not being able to keep the services people need in town. She asked residents to vote “Yes” on the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget, noting it was a no brainer.

Ms. Sharon Pealer, 48 Highland Drive, Ledyard, stated she has been a Ledyard resident for thirty years and a homeowner for twenty-seven years. She stated she looked at the budget noting that the funding for one of the necessary services, which was Emergency Dispatch Communications, was cut in half. She stated she could understand cutting costs, however, she suggested they find something else to cut. She asked that the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget be reconsidered. She stated that she hoped to retire in a few years and sell her home, noting that she was currently at retirement age, however, she stated she could not retire, because of the cost to live in Ledyard. Therefore, she stated she had to wait to retire so she could receive more from Social Security. She stated every year she has lived in Ledyard that the taxes have gone up. She stated her property taxes were paid through her mortgage and every year she received a letter from the Mortgage Lender stating that they had to increase her mortgage payment to cover the cost of the tax increase. She stated based on the proposed Mil Rate increase her property taxes would increase by over \$130. She stated for people who were on a retired fixed income that \$130 was a lot of money, noting that \$130 could mean several meals; or maybe medicine. She stated that she understood that the schools wanted to be improved. However, she stated they also need to look at the other Elephant in the room, per-se, which was that land could be annexed per the Bureau of Indian Affairs and taken off the tax rolls. She questioned what would happen if after the Town had their Annual Budget in-place, the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation (MPTN) said that they were going to annex a certain amount of land, that would come off the tax rolls. She stated that would mean that everyone's taxes were going to go up, noting that no one seemed to be paying attention to that. She stated they needed to keep in-mind the real world, which was that they did not have control of these types of things, but that these things were going to happen.

Chairman Rodriguez thanked Ms. Pealer for her comments. She noted that she wanted to address the following two points:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs – Chairman Rodriguez stated the Mayor has been providing updates to the Town Council; and that she has been meeting with the Mayor. She stated that Ledyard would be addressing the annexation issue.
- Emergency Dispatch Communications funding was cut in half – Councilor Rodriguez provided clarification noting that the Emergency Dispatch Communications Operations Fundings was not being cut in half. She explained the Town Council had a two-year plan to set aside funding in 2025 and 2026 to replace the Dispatch Emergency Communications CAD/RMS System which has been in use since 2012. She stated because the town was applying for a \$240,000 *COPS Law Enforcement Technology and Equipment Grant* to replace the CAD/RMS System and to add other technology equipment that Chief Rich needed they reduced the Capital Fund allocation in 2025 with the hope that Ledyard's Grant Applications would be approved. She stated Councilor Buhle has been working with Senator Blumenthal and Senator Murphy's Office to submit the Congressional Directed Spending Grant Application. She stated the Police Chief was notified of the cut in funding and that he agreed. She went on to explain that if Ledyard does not receive the Grant Funding that additional funds would be allocated in 2026 to replace the CAD/RMS System. Ms. Pealer stated that she was not in the practice of counting her chickens until they were hatched.

Mr. Jacob Hurt, 6 Nugget Hill Drive, Gales Ferry, stated he has lived at this address for thirteen years, noting that he agreed that every year the property taxes have gone up. He stated he now paid about \$1,000 more in property taxes than he did when he first moved to town in 2011. He stated as many already articulated this evening that there was a lot this year in the proposed budget that they could not control. He thanked them for accepting the reality and for making those things part of the plan. He stated the experience the elected officials brought to their offices was extensive and he stated they did a great job in doing their due diligence with looking at the numbers and with looking at things that they could control, such as the grant funding applications. He stated the Congressional Directed Spending was another way to try to bring in funding to offset some costs. He stated that they listened to the voters, and they listened to the professionals, and they gave them what they needed. He stated they made decisions that took courage, and he commended all eighteen of them for their work on both the Board of Education and the Town Council. He stated while he agreed that there was going to be a tax increase again this year, that unlike previous years, this was an increase he could get behind because it was going to give the town what it needed, noting that they would not get everything they wanted. He stated a lot of work was done to put the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget together, therefore, he stated that he could get behind this increase and that he hoped they would all join him in supporting the proposed budget.

Ms. Sarah Desormier, 38 Robin Hood Drive, Gales Ferry, thanked all those who did the hard work at all of the Finance Committee meetings, noting that she watches the meeting videos on-line. She stated that she was impressed and that she appreciated all those who understand the budgeting process. She questioned the reason there were no Republican Town Councilors at the March 27, 2024 meeting, when they addressed the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget.

Chairman Rodriguez replied to Ms. Desormier's question regarding the March 27, 2024 Town Council Meeting, noting that she had excused the three Town Councilors from the meeting for valid personal reasons. She explained that their elected officials also had personal lives which may sometimes prevent them from attending a meeting. She stated that she would not go into details, stating it was not for her to tell.

Ms. Desormier followed-up by questioning the validity of the vote if all of the constituents representatives were not present at the meeting. Chairman Rodriguez stated none of the Town Councilors were paid and that they do their very best for the town. She noted that she was 100% confident that they all do their best despite life occurrences that may come up. Ms. Desormier stated that she did not doubt that the members of the Town Council were doing their best for the town.

Councilor Ryan addressed Ms. Desormier's question regarding the March 27, 2024 attendance. He stated that he had a family obligation that evening, so he could not attend the meeting.

Mr. Mike Cherry, 5 Whippoorwill Drive, Gales Ferry, stated he has lived in Ledyard for forty-years noting that both of his kids attended the Ledyard School System. He stated he was retired and decided to stay in Ledyard for a lot of reasons, noting that he saw a lot of his neighbors present this evening. He congratulated everyone who worked on the budget, noting that he attended the Finance Committee's first Budget Work Session that was held on March 7, 2024 which he traditionally tried to do to see what the tone was, and to listen to the Mayor present his proposed budget. He stated because he was not an educator; he was not an educational administrator; and he was not a public works person, that he does not attend the remainder of the Budget Work Sessions because he trusted the people who do those jobs to do right by us.

Mr. Cherry continued by addressing some of the comments made this evening as follows:

- ***What the \$300,000 over the Superintendent of Schools and the Mayor's proposed Budget was being used for.*** Mr. Cherry stated the information was available on-line noting the funding would be used to pay for the increase in wages for the Substitute Teachers, Transportation costs, and for more Human Resources, etc.
- ***Average Per Pupil Expenditures*** - Mr. Cherry stated in reviewing the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget that he looked at the Budget Requests by Tier that were not funded this year which totaled about \$2.4 million. He stated if these costs were added to the Education Budget that Ledyard's Per Pupil Expenditure would be about average for the State of Connecticut. However, he stated \$2.4 million would equate to about 2 mil increase, noting that if all this was included in the budget that the taxpayers would not approve the budget. He stated he would love the schools to have another \$2.4 million, noting that he has talked with the Superintendent of Schools about this for many years, and that the Superintendent would love to have it too. However, he stated it was not realistic.
- ***General Government Budget*** – Mr. Cherry stated as they have discussed in the past that Ledyard had to find more money; or reduce services. He stated that Ledyard could find more money by increasing their Grand List. He explained that Ledyard's Grand List was based on residential property, noting that they needed to do more to market the town to attract things that were not residential that pay taxes, however, he stated it was difficult to find those things.

Mr. Cherry went on to state there was a 40% difference between the Grand List and the Equalized Grand List, which was based on today's Market Value, noting that although they would see a house for sale in Ledyard priced at \$429,000 that its assessed value was only \$207,000. He stated this year was a revaluation year, noting that Ledyard's real estate values would increase by about 40% as they would do in other towns. However, he stated during past revaluation years they have seen the assessed values of the smaller homes increase, while the assessed values of the larger homes decrease. He explained the reason the smaller homes were worth more over the ten year revaluation period was because no one wanted to buy the bigger homes. He stated with the higher interest rates that he believed the same type of thing would happen at the end of the year. Therefore, he stated it would behoove all of them to market Ledyard and find a business they want in their town. He stated Ledyard had a number of empty store fronts, while neighboring towns were getting big businesses, more apartments, more industry, and so their Grand Lists would go up. In addition, their budgets would go up; and what they pay their people would go up. He went on to state when Ledyard's union employees conducted salary comparisons, that the town was going to have to pay them more; therefore, he stated they needed to market Ledyard. He stated he supported the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget; and congratulated everyone for a *Job Well Done!*

Mr. Eric Treaster, 10 Huntington Way, Ledyard, thanked everyone for their work to put together the budgets for next year. He noted he had the following comments and questions:

- **Revaluation** – Mr. Treaster stated he was a member of the Board of Assessment Appeals and he noted that Mr. Cherry was correct in that Ledyard was due for a revaluation this year. Mr. Treaster urged the Town Council to allocate adequate funding to pay for a thorough revaluation. He stated their current assessments were primarily based on drive-by photographs, noting by inspecting the interior of a home that it would make a significant difference in the value of the property. He noted as an example a home with a granite countertop would have a higher value than a home with a formica countertop.
- **Legal Fees- Land Use Department** – Mr. Treaster stated a new budget line was included in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget to pay for legal fees for the Land Use Department. He stated he did not know what the town's new Land Use Attorney Robert Avena of the Law Firm Suisman-Shapiro charged per hour. However, he stated assuming a fee of \$200.00 per hour the Legal Fee allocation for Land Use matters would only pay for 40 hours for the year. He stated this was not much for something as complicated as land use, zoning, and appeals, especially 8-30 appeals. He urged the Town Council to increase the Land Use Legal Fee budget line. He suggested since we were not getting much snow anymore that they move funding from the Snow Removal budget to the Land Use Legal Fee account.
- **Legal Notices Land Use** – Mr. Treaster stated \$6,500 was allocated for the newspaper publication of the Land Use Notices. He stated assuming a typical legal notice cost \$150 in the New London Day newspaper that the current budget allocation would pay for 40 legal notices. He explained that three legal notices were required to be published for one Special Permit Application, noting that the current budget allocation would pay for 40 Applications during the year, which he believed was high. He stated Ledyard does not typically receive 40 Special Permit Applications or Site Plan Reviews in one year.
- **Land Use Revenues** – Mr. Treaster explained that the Special Permit Applications come with a \$550 Fee. However, he stated that he could not find the revenues for the Land Use Permit Applications in the proposed budget. He stated the Special Permit Application Fees were intended to pay for most of the Legal Notices, that he addressed this evening (see above).
- **Board of Education Budget** – Mr. Treaster noted the addition of targeted Interventionist for literacy and numeracy to help students who were struggling to meet grade level learning expectations; and the addition of a Coordinator in the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. He questioned: (1) Whether the addition of these positions was mandated by the State; or was this something that was unique to Ledyard; and (2) Whether the Board of Education had metrics for how successful these dollars were.

Board of Education Finance Committee Chairman Joanne Kelley stated that the Education Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget included a Multi-Tiered System of Support Coordinator. She explained that the Board of Education has been incrementally adding Interventionist positions to their staff over multiple years, noting that the addition of the Coordinator in next year's budget would be the final piece to the Plan. She stated the Coordinator would oversee the School District's Intervention Team. She stated the Multi-Tiered Interventionists System was not unique to Ledyard, noting because they were seeing a persistent achievement gap in literacy and numeracy that they needed to address it. She stated the Coordinator should have been added to the current year's budget (fy 23/24), but because the Board of Education was keeping their eye on the bottom line the addition of the Coordinator position was deferred to Fiscal Year 2024/2025. Ms. Kelley stated the Interventionist/Multi-Tiered System of Support Coordinator was the Gold Standard.

Superintendent of Schools Jason Hartling stated that School Districts typically have one Multi-Tiered System of Support Coordinator for each of their schools. He stated with the addition of the Coordinator in the upcoming year's budget that Ledyard would finally have one Coordinator for their entire School District. He stated in addition to supporting the Interventionists that the Coordinator would also support individual grade levels. He addressed Mr. Treaster's question regarding the return on investment, explaining because Ledyard has not yet had a Multi-Tiered System of Support Coordinator that he could not provide that type of metrics data.

Mr. Treaster thanked Ms. Kelley and Mr. Hartling for answering his questions. He stated that Ledyard Public Schools had a good reputation, noting that he thought if they had that type of metrics data that they could advertise it. He concluded his remarks by stating that he respected those who worked through each line of the budget minutia and were able to get it to make sense, stating *Job Well Done!*

Mr. Brandon Graber, 42 Church Hill Road, Ledyard, Board of Education Member, addressed the use of \$1 million from the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund; noting that 2% of the town's revenues for the upcoming Fiscal Year 2024/2025 would be coming from the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund, not the taxpayers. He questioned the following: (1) Mil Rate Stabilization Fund Balance; (2) Whether the use of the Mil Rate Stabilization Funding would be used toward Capital Projects or Operational Expenses; and (3) Sustainability of the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund.

Mayor Allyn, III, provided some background regarding the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund stating the Town began the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund about seven years ago. He explained when the Town issued Bonds to pay for large Capital Projects such as the Police Headquarters Facility Project, the School(s) Consolidation/Improvement Projects (Middle School & Gallup Hill School); the School Roof Projects, that the Town was offered Bond Issuance Premiums from the Purchasers of the Bond Notes. He stated the Bond Issuance Premiums could range anywhere from \$200,000 to \$600,000; and he explained that these funds were deposited into the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund, as a future hedge against future Mil Rate increases. He stated the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund was not funded by the over collection of taxpayers dollars.

Mayor Allyn went on to explain by using the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund they would be able to offset the increase to the mil rate by almost 1 mil for the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. He stated after utilizing \$1 million for Fiscal Year 2023/2024 (current year) that the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund would have a balance of more than \$3.5 million. He stated in past years the town has budgeted for the use of the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund, however, when they have come to the end of the year, by keeping expenditures low and receiving more revenue than expected, that they have not had to use the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund. He went on to explain although they were budgeting for the use of the Stabilization Fund for the upcoming Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget, that they do not know if they would need to utilize those funds during the fiscal year. Mayor Allyn stated should the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund be used that the town would need to come up with the funding again the following budget year, explaining because the amount of money in Mil Rate Stabilization Fund was finite they could eventually exhaust the Fund. He stated the challenge was how do they mitigate the mil rate increase, and not consume the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund. He stated in past years, the town has not had to use the Mil Rate Stabilization funding, as initially planned when the budget was prepared.

Mr. Graber stated over the past seven years the town collected \$4 million from the Bond Issuance Premiums, noting that they were planning to spend 25% of those funds during the Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget. Mayor Allyn stated that Mr. Graber's comment was correct, noting that the other option was to increase the Mil Rate by 1.65 mils for the upcoming year. Therefore, he stated without the use of the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund that the hypothetical tax increases Councilor Saccone presented earlier this evening would need to double. Mr. Graber stated another option would be to review the budget again to look at their spending to bring it down to a reasonable budget. Mayor Allyn stated that Mr. Graber's comment was an option.

Chairman Rodriguez asked Board of Education Member Mr. Graber whether he voted for the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget in the amount of \$38,369,823. Mr. Graber responded stating at the Board's February 15, 2024 meeting that he did vote to forward the Education Budget to the Town Council.

Chairman Rodriguez questioned the last time the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund was used to balance the budget. Mayor Allyn, III, stated although he could not recall the year that they did use about \$500,000 from the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund one time.

Councilor Ryan provided clarification regarding Board of Education Member Mr. Graber's vote on the Education Budget, noting that the Board of Education did not have a say in the use of the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund. He explained the use of the Mil Rate Stabilization Fund was determined on the General Government side of the budget. Therefore, he stated he did not understand Chairman Rodriguez's intention for asking Mr. Graber whether he voted for the Education Budget. Chairman Rodriguez stated her intention was not negative. Councilor Ryan stated that he believed that it was. Chairman Rodriguez called a *Point of Order*. Councilor Ryan stated that he was not going to let Mr. Graber be misrepresented. Chairman Rodriguez stated that she was not misrepresenting Mr. Graber's vote, asking that Councilor Ryan maintain meeting decorum. Chairman Rodriguez thanked Mr. Graber for his comments, and again called a *Point of Order*. Councilor Ryan stated that he didn't care (regarding the Point of Order) and that he was not going to let Mr. Graber be misrepresented.

Councilor Brunelle stated that Council Members could not talk badly to other members of the Town Council, noting that it was not allowed per Roberts Rules. Councilor Ryan stated he agreed with Councilor Brunelle's comments, thanking Councilor Brunelle for recognizing that Chairman Rodriguez was talking badly. Councilor Brunelle stated that it was Councilor Ryan who was talking badly. Chairman Rodriguez called a *Point of Order, Please!*.

Mr. Graber stated he was not a member of the Board of Education when the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 was discussed and developed. He explained that he was appointed to fill Ms. Wier's vacancy on the Board of Education on February 15, 2024 which was the meeting at which the Board of Education voted on the budget. Therefore, he did not know how it was developed. Chairman Rodriguez thanked Mr. Graber for his comments.

Mr. Mike Cherry, 5 Whippoorwill Drive, Gales Ferry, stated there was a tremendous amount of information regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget on-line. He stated in accordance with the Town Charter that both the Board of Education and the Mayor have provided actions to be taken if the budget does not pass, or if the State Funding does not meet the goals they have. He stated all of this information was available on-line, and he encouraged residents to read the budget information. He stated if they vote against the proposed budget that the possible actions would need to be executed to get the expenses down to what they budgeted for.

Chairman Rodriguez stated the following written communications were submitted for tonight's Public Hearing, noting that they were all in-favor, and expressed support for the proposed Fiscal Year 2024/2025:

1. Mr. Jelden email dated 4/9/2024 re: Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget
2. Mr. Pearson email dated 4/09/2024 re: Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget
3. M/M. Daivs email dated 4/10/2024 re: Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget
4. Mr. Scott email dated 4/14/2024 re: Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget
5. Mr. Grenger email dated 4/14/2024 re: Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget
6. Ms. Siegel-Miles email dated 4/15/2024 re: Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget
7. Ms. Doblecki email dated 4/15/2024 re: Fiscal Year 2024/2025 Budget

Chairman Rodriguez asked whether there were any residents attending the meeting remotely via Zoom Video Conference that would like to provide comments. – It as noted of those attending remotely that no one has indicated that they would like to provide comments.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Hearing no additional public comments, Chairman Rodriguez adjourned the public hearing at 8:00 p.m.

Chairman Rodriguez thanked everyone for attending tonight's Public Hearing.

Transcribed by Roxanne M. Maher
Administrative Assistant to the Town Council

I, S. Naomi Rodriguez, Chairman of the Ledyard Town Council,
hereby certify that the above and foregoing is a true and correct
copy of the minutes of the Public Hearing held on April 15, 2024.

Attest: _____
S. Naomi Rodriguez, Chairman