



TOWN OF LEDYARD
CONNECTICUT
TOWN COUNCIL
HYBRID FORMAT

741 Colonel Ledyard Highway

Ledyard, CT 06339

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860 464-3203

Roxanne Maher

Administrative Assistant

Chairman S. Naomi Rodriguez

MINUTES
FINANCE COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING

Wednesday, April 2, 2025

5:30 PM

Annex Meeting Room - Video Conference

DRAFT

- I. **CALL TO ORDER** - The Meeting was called to order by Committee Chairman Councilor Saccone at 3:34 p.m. at the Council Chambers Town Hall Annex Building.

Councilor Saccone welcomed all to the Hybrid Meeting. He stated for the Town Council Finance Committee and members of the Public who were participating via video conference that the remote meeting information was available on the Agenda that was posted on the Town's Website – Granicus-Legistar Meeting Portal.

II. **ROLL CALL**

Attendee Name	Title	Status	Location	Arrived	Departed
Jessica Buhle	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person	3:34 pm	7:41 pm
Tim Ryan	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person	3:34 pm	7:41 pm
Tony Saccone	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person	3:34 pm	7:41 pm
S. Naomi Rodriguez	Town Council Chairman	Present	In-Person	3:34 pm	7:41 pm
Carmen Garcia-Irizary	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person	3:34 pm	7:41 pm
Matthew Bonin	Finance Director	Present	In-Person	3:34 pm	7:41 pm
Ian Stammel	Assistant Finance Director	Present	In-Person	3:34 pm	7:41 pm
Christine Dias	Administrator of Human Resources	Present	In-Person	3:34 pm	4:30 pm
Jason Hartling	Superintendent of Schools	Present	Remote	3:34 pm	7:41 pm
Roxanne Maher	Administrative Assistant	Present	Remote	3:34 pm	7:41 pm

III. **BUSINESS OF THE MEETING**

Without objection the Finance Committee agreed to reorder the Agenda to address the Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget as Item #3.

1. **MOTION** to recommend the Town Council acknowledge the following "*Advisory Questions*" will be placed on the May 20, 2025 Referendum, in accordance with Chapter VII, Section 7 of the Town Charter:

- 1.) Do you believe the **Board of Education budget** is:

☐ Too High

Or

☐ Too Low

2.) Do you believe the **General Government budget** is:

- ☐ Too High
Or
☐ Too Low

Moved by Councilor Saccone, seconded by Councilor Ryan

Discussion: Councilor Saccone noted in accordance with Chapter VII: Section 7 of the Town Charter "*Advisory Questions*" that the initial annual budget referendum may be used to place non-binding advisory questions on the voting machines. He stated that Advisory questions may be proposed by petition of at least 100 Town electors or by the written request of at least four of the elected town officers listed in Chapter II, Section 3. He stated on March 25 & 26 the Town Clerk received letters from four Elected Officers requesting that Advisory Questions be included on the May 20, 2025 Budget Referendum.

Councilor Saccone explained that this action was only to acknowledge that the Advisory Questions would be on the Referendum.

Councilor Buhle questioned what would happen if the Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget passes, but the response to the Advisory Questions stated that the budget was too high.

It was noted that if the Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget passes that no further action would be required regardless of the response to the Advisory Questions.

VOTE: 3– 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVE TO RECOMMEND 3 – 0

MOVER: Tony Saccone, Town Councilor

SECONDER: Tim Ryan, Town Councilor

AYES: Jessica Buhle, Tony Saccone, Tim Ryan

2. MOTION to recommend the Town Council adopted a proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Water Operations Budget in the amount \$1,756,531.80.

Moved Councilor Saccone, seconded by Councilor Ryan

Discussion: Administrative Assistant Roxanne Maher stated in accordance with Section 4 of Ordinance #400-001 "*An Ordinance Establishing a Water Pollution Control Authority*" which states: "*The WPCA shall provide, by the fourth Monday in April, a budget of estimated revenues, expenditures and capital improvements for the ensuing fiscal year for inclusion as an appendix in the Town annual budget. **The Town Council shall approve the water system budget.***"

Assistant Finance Director Ian Stammel noted that the Water Operations Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget increased by \$248,348.18 because their water provider, Groton Utilities, increase their water rate by 4% and other operational costs.

Administrative Assistant Roxanne Maher explained per State Statute and Ordinance \$400-001 that the Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA) would be required to hold a Public Hearing prior to increasing their water rates; and that the Town Council was required to approve the water rate increase.

Assistant Finance Director Ian Stammel went on to explain that although Groton Utilities has been increasing their water rate over the last five-years that the WPCA had not passed that increase along to ratepayers the last three-years. Therefore, he stated the WPCA needed to pass the water rate increase along to ratepayers.

Chairman Rodriguez questioned how the WPCA was able to pay for the annual expenses if they did not pass along the water rate increase for this year.

Assistant Finance Director Ian Stammel stated because of the amount of water used that adequate revenues were received to cover the WPCA's expenses, noting that Groton Utilities handles the Billing for the WPCA. Therefore, he stated along with increasing their expenses that the WPCA also increased their revenues in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget.

Councilor Ryan questioned whether they had to consider the um depreciation expense in the overall budget increase noting the numbers do not match up. Assistant Finance Director Ian Stammel explained the General Government Budget was required to follow GAP Accounting, so they include the depreciation. However, he stated because the Water Operations and Sewer Operations were Enterprise Funds noting that their Depreciation Expense Account was not budgeted, noting that it was hundreds of thousands of dollars of infrastructure, however, he stated it was not cash dollars.

Mr. Stammel went on to explain that there was a \$450,000 write off expense in Fiscal Year 2022/2023 that had to do with assets that were listed on the Asset Spreadsheet, noting that it was a non-cash item.

VOTE:

3– 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVE TO RECOMMEND 3 – 0

MOVER: Tony Saccone, Town Councilor

SECONDER: Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor

AYES: Jessica Buhle, Tony Saccone, Tim Ryan

3. Discussion and possible action regarding the Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget.

The Finance Committee discussed with Finance Director Matthew Bonin, Assistant Finance Director Ian Stammel, Administrator of Human Resources Christine Dias, and School Superintendent Jason Hartling discussed the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 as follows:

- ***Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget Format***

Councilor Ryan noted that he would like to see the following:

- ✓ ***Board of Education Healthcare Expenses*** – Councilor Ryan stated that he agreed with the Mayor Allyn's proposal to move the Board of Education Employees Healthcare Expenses to the Education side of the budget ledger for the following reasons:

- (1) The Board of Education's Employees Healthcare Expenses were part of the School District's operational costs.
- (2) Transparency – Councilor Ryan stated for accurate accounting of operational costs and for transparency Board of Education expenses should reside on the education side of the budget ledger.
- (3) Accountability – Councilor Ryan noted that the Board of Education should have oversight of their operational expenses.

Councilor Saccone stated although he 100% agreed that the Board of Education Employees Healthcare Expenses and the School Nurses Expenses should be recorded on the education side of the budget ledger, that he did not agree with making the move in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget. He explained that because the School Nurses Contract was scheduled to end next year (fy 26/27) that he would suggest they wait to the following year to move these expenses to the education side of the budget ledger. He stated this would give the Board of Education and School Superintendent Hartling 18 months to evaluate their needs, so they could plan accordingly and for the Town Council and Board of Education to work together and plan for the accounting change.

Councilor Buhle stated that she agreed with Councilor Saccone's comments regarding moving the Board of Education Employees Healthcare and School Nurses back to the education side of the budget ledger; noting that two-weeks was not enough time to make this type of decision.

Councilor Garcia-Irizarry stated that the Board of Education would be discussing a draft Job Description "*Manager of Employee Benefits*" to hire an employee to manage their Healthcare. She stated that this position would report to the Human Resources Director.

Councilor Buhle addressed the role of the Board of Education Human Resources Director noting the number of employees they had to manage, noting that the General Government's Administrator of Human Resources only had a few employees.

Finance Director Matthew Bonin explained other than moving where the Board of Education Employees Healthcare dollars were recorded in the budget ledger, that there would not be any other changes. He stated that the Board of Education was already handling the health insurance for their employees. He stated that the General Government just pays the invoices. He went on to explain that the Town uses a Healthcare Consultant, who was not tied to the Healthcare provider; and that the Healthcare Consultant was paid from the Plan.

Councilor Saccone noted that based on Mr. Bonin's explanation of how the Healthcare was currently being handled by both the Board of Education existing staff and the General Government's staff, that he did not understand School Superintendent Mr. Hartling comments that moving the expenses and funds to the education side of the budget ledger would incur additional costs for the Board of Education.

Mr. Hartling stated by moving the Board of Education's Employees Healthcare Expenses to the Education side of the ledger that they could anticipate an increased cost of about \$100,000 to take on the fiduciary responsibility of the managing a \$6 million program, because they do not have a staffing model to handle the work that has been being managed by the General Government Staff for 24 years.

Mr. Hartling went on to state that the Board of Education would have to hire Healthcare Consultants to adequately examine the Healthcare Plan to ensure that they were acting in the most responsible way for both their employees and the Town of Ledyard. He stated that there would also be the legal fees to renegotiate with their labor contracts; and that it would require the addition of one Full-Time Staff person in the Central Office. He noted that the Brown & Brown Employee Benefits Consulting Team was a commission based Consultant.

Mr. Harting continued by stating that he would have to have a conversation with the Mayor about what would happen for the General Government Employees Healthcare, noting that there would be no obligation for the Board of Education to include the General Government Employees.

Councilor Saccone stated that he would hope that the Board of Education would work to try to save taxpayers money and that they would offer the General Government the opportunity to participate in the same Healthcare Plan so that they could also receive those same savings.

Mr. Hartling stated it was not as simple as the town government choosing to sign on onto the Board of Education's Healthcare. He stated in addition to the costs associated with working with their collective bargaining units was their claim rating, noting that it was more complex then it appeared to be. He stated the Board of Education has been reaching out to Brown and Brown Healthcare Consultants to understand some of those implications.

Mr. Hartling went on to state that the Board of Education has always acted in the best interest when making big moves. He stated having a conversation as a collaborative team would get much better results.

Councilor Ryan stated moving the Board of Education Employees Healthcare expenses to the education side of the budget ledger was truly a shift on paper. He suggested going forward that the Finance Committees of the Board of Education and Town Council schedule regular joint meetings throughout the year to discuss these types of issues. Councilor Buhle stated that she agreed with scheduling regular joint meetings of the Finance Committees throughout the year to maintain a open dialogue.

Councilor Buhle stated because they do not have control over the cost of healthcare that it could increase by 15% in one year. Therefore, she stated that the Board of Education's total budget could significantly increase; and that they could lose site of the students in working to manage those types of budgetary increases.

Councilor Buhle went on to question the reason Account #1010253-52102 (Benefits Consultant) had been funded at \$10,000 and that no funding was allocated in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget. Administrator of Human Resources Christine Dias explained because Brown & Brown Employee Benefits Consultant was being paid from another budget account that Account #1010253-52102 (Benefits Consultant) had not been used; therefore, the account line was not funding for the upcoming fiscal year budget.

✓ ***Legal Fees***

- ❖ MOTION to reduce Account #10110251-53610 (HR Legal Services) by \$10,000 for an adjusted budget amount of \$40,000.

In addition, increase Account #10114301-5361(Land Use Legal Fees) by \$10,000 for an adjusted budget amount of \$40,000.

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor Ryan

Discussion: Councilor Buhle noted the significant size of the Applications the Land Use Department would be addressing this year. Therefore, she suggested increasing the Land Use Legal Fees Account by \$10,000.

Councilor Buhle asked Administrator of Human Resources Christine Dias the reason the Human Resources Legal Fees was being increased by \$10,000 over the current year's (fy 24/25) budget allocation.

Administrator of Human Resources Christine Dias responded to Councilor Buhle's question by explaining that the town would be negotiating four labor contracts in the coming year. She stated that each contract negotiation costs about \$10,000; therefore, she requested \$50,000 in the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget to cover the legal fees for the four labor contracts; and an additional \$10,000 for other associated expenses.

VOTE: 3– 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED 3 – 0

MOVER: Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor

SECONDER: Tim Ryan, Town Councilor

AYES: Jessica Buhle, Tony Saccone, Tim Ryan

- ✓ ***Separate the General Government and Board of Education Budgets*** – Councilor Ryan stated by having separate budgets the taxpayers could see where their taxes were going.

Councilor Buhle stated that she did not support separating budgets two budgets.

Superintendent Hartling stated that bifurcating the budget was not as simple as just separating the General Government and Board of Education's budgets, and a conversation around a table. He stated the Board of Education was required to report their expenses to the State Board of Education.

✓ **Per Pupil Expenditure**

Superintendent Hartling stated all their expenses including bonding costs and “In-Kind” expenses that were paid from the General Government’s side of the budget ledger were factored into their Per Pupil Expenditure. He stated every School District has to report those numbers the same whether they were allocated on the town side of the budget ledger or the education side of the budget ledger.

It was noted that some Connecticut towns allocate huge percentages of the Police Department to the School District. Therefore, it was town by town; noting that it was not an apples-to-apples comparison based on the services.

Councilor Buhle stated recording the Board of Education Employee Healthcare Expenses on the education side of the budget ledger would account for a big portion of their budget, noting that a substantial portion of the Board of Education’s budget was already allocated for expenses that were not necessarily student-facing services such as electricity and transportation. Therefore, she stated if they were increasing the Board of Education’s Budget by 5.98%, that increase should be for student services. She noted that the **Green Box** in the Board of Education’s proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget included a lot of really great additions to programs.

Green Recommended to be Included in the Budget

\$668,939

REQUEST	ESTIMATED COST	LOCATION	TYPE
3.0 FTE Elementary STEM	\$193,896	Curriculum	Salary
Elementary STEM Materials	\$4,500	Elementary	Equipment
Increase TEAM Mentor Payment to \$750 a year	\$9,983	Curriculum	Salary
General Curriculum Supplies	\$4,700	Curriculum	Supplies
Central Office Surge Capacity	\$3,120	Curriculum	Salary
Intervention Resources	\$15,000	Curriculum	Supplies
Math Learning Center K-5 (student books, manipulatives, intervention resources)	\$17,62	Curriculum	Supplies
Curriculum Associates iReady/Ready Classroom 6-8 (ELA & Math)	\$44,266	Curriculum	Supplies
Textbook – General Instruction (increase over prior year)	\$16,772	Curriculum	Supplies
DreamBox	\$25,728	Curriculum	Supplies
Forefront Platform K-5	\$5,736	Curriculum	Supplies
Ignite -Literacy Intervention Program	\$50,000	Curriculum	Professional Services
Various Athletic Expense Increases	\$31,450	LHS Athletics	Other

✓ **Separate the Mil Rate for the General Government and Board of Education.** Councilor Ryan stated in addition to having separate budgets that he believed that having separate mil rates would provide transparency to the taxpayers on where their money was being spent.

✓ **Budget Advisory Questions** – Councilor Ryan stated that he was pleased to see that Budget Advisory Questions would be included on the ballot, noting that it would help to understand the taxpayers position on the budget.

- ✓ **Department Head Salary Increases** – Councilor Bule addressed the select Department Heads that received increases, noting that she was interested in seeing the Salary Study the Mayor obtained.

Chairman Rodriguez noted the following Department Head increases, and she questioned what the increases were based on noting the current economy, residents were being laid off, and some that some were on a fixed income. She stated that many residents thought that double digit the increases were excessive:

- Finance Director - an increase of \$21,541 or 19.3%.

Chairman Rodriguez suggested the Finance Director's Salary be decreased from \$133,000 to \$130,000.

Councilor Ryan stated the Town had a quality employee who is a CPA and worked as a Municipal Auditor. He stated that the Market Rate for a Finance Director was comparable to the proposed salary or higher. Therefore, he stated that they need to be realistic. He also noted that the Board of Education's Finance Director's salary was \$22,000 higher. He stated although the Board of Education had a larger budget that all of the budget management for the entire town (General Government & Board of Education) comes back to the Finance Director.

- Town Clerk – an increase of \$10,322 or 15.4%.

Chairman Rodriguez suggested the Town Clerk's 15% salary increase be reduced to an 8% increase.

Councilor Buhle stated although a 15% salary increase was a lot that it was not negligible. In addition, the Town Clerk had to have specialized knowledge for the position.

- Administrator of Human Resources – an increase of \$5,510; or 5.6% - Administrator of Human Resources Christine Dias stated in her case that some of the salary increase was related to a change in staff filling the position. She stated because she came into the salary mid-year that the 5.6% reflected the salary she came in at; and a 3% increase for this year. She noted that she believed the same was true for the Land Use Director (noted below).
- Town Planner/Land Use Director – an increase of \$10,010 or 10.2%

Administrator of Human Resources Christine Dias explained the Salary Study was conducted in 2023; and it was based on municipalities that were similar in size (population and budget) to Ledyard;. She stated the Department Head salaries that were increased in the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget were below Market Value.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that salary increases of 19.3%; 15.5%; and 10.2% does not look good to the taxpayers.

Councilor Ryan stated that Salary Market Rate Adjustments also happen outside of the municipal environment, noting that they happen in private business for one reason or another, including attrition. Therefore, he stated if the town wanted to retain, or attract qualified people that were experienced and could bring what they need to Ledyard that they needed to periodically adjust salaries to the Market Rates. He stated because salary increases for their Department Heads have been put off for a number of years that trying to catch up to Market Rate was painful. However, he stated what he was concerned about was losing Qualified, Experienced Individuals.

Councilor Buhle stated she agreed with Chairman Rodriguez's concerns about the optics of the salary increases, noting from a taxpayer perspective that when they look at their tax bill and see an increase, that it was easy to pinpoint 10% increases in the budget. She stated that these salary increases were not contractual, and although she was not suggesting they reduce the salary increases that she was questioning whether this was the year to increase these salaries; or whether they could use a staggered approach

Assistant Finance Director Ian Stammel noted that it has been nearly 10-years since the town tried to bring the Department Head Salaries in-line with area towns.

Councilor Ryan stated we ask a lot of our town employees, noting that last time the town conducted a Salary Study and looked to bring their Department Heads' salaries in-line with the Market Rate was nearly ten years ago. He stated that residents were going to see the salary percentage increases; however, he stated the amount of the total salary increases they were talking about far less than the \$2.3 million increase for the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget. He stated what Chairman Rodriguez and Councilor Buhle were talking about was optics.

Councilor Saccone and Councilor Ryan stated that they did not agree with changing the Department Head Salary increases as proposed in the Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget.

Councilor Buhle stated that Councilor Ryan was right with regard to the town being behind the curve for a long time in providing adequate compensation for employees. She noted that Ledyard has been fortunate to retain their employees. Therefore she stated that she was not in favor of adjusting Department Head Salaries.

Councilor Buhle stated that the Parks, Recreation, & Senior Citizen Director at \$86,642 received the lowest salary increase of the Department Heads, noting that he has taken on the additional role of the Senior Citizens Director when the two Commissions were combined.

- ❖ MOTION to increase the Parks, Recreation, & Senior Citizens Director's Salary to \$87,484 for 4% increase over the current fiscal year (fy 24/25).

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor Saccone

Discussion: Assistant Finance Director Ian Stammel stated when the two Commissions were combined in 2019 that the salary was increased from \$66,786 to \$73,350 to compensate for the additional responsibilities of the combined position. He also noted at that time Nursing Director Karen Goetchius took on the role of Municipal Agent for the Senior Citizens.

Administrator of Human Resources Christine Dias stated in reviewing the Salary Study that the \$86,642 was comparable to other Parks & Recreation Directors, which was the reason this position received the 3% increase that all other employees received.

Councilor Buhle questioned whether the comparable Parks & Recreation Directors were also serving as the Senior Citizens Director. Ms. Dias stated in doing a quick review it does not look like the comparable Parks & Recreation Directors were also the Senior Citizens Director.

VOTE: 3– 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED 3 – 0

MOVER: Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor

SECONDER: Tony Saccone, Town Councilor

AYES: Jessica Buhle, Tony Saccone, Tim Ryan

✓ ***MIS Department:***

- ❖ MOITON to reduce Account #10112151-53690 (Software Support/Maintenance) by \$7,675 for an adjusted budget of \$86,511.

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor Ryan

Discussion: Councilor Buhle stated during the March 10, 2025 Budget Work Session that MIS Director Justin Dube stated that additional funding was included in the Software Support/Maintenance Account because the Library was considering discontinuing their subscription to LION (Libraries Online Consortium); and that additional funding would be needed to provide support to the Library. However, she stated for next year (fy 25/26) that the Library would be continuing with LION, therefore, she stated the additional \$7,675s would not be needed. She stated that the Library would need to provide a one-year advanced notice to LION to discontinue their subscription.

VOTE: 3– 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED 3 – 0

MOVER: Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor

SECONDER: Tim Ryan, Town Councilor

AYES: Jessica Buhle, Tony Saccone, Tim Ryan

✓ ***Parks & Recreation:***

Finance Director Matthew Bonin noted that \$161,460 was budgeted for Account \$10160101-53700 (Contract/Maintenance/ Leases). However, he stated although the town received the required three bids that the low bid came in at \$243,250.

Councilor Saccone suggested the town rebid the contract for maintenance of the fields.

Councilor Buhle noted that \$243,250 was a 39% increase in costs over the current year to maintain the fields. Mr. Bonin explained that the contract was for three years, noting that the current cost of \$161,460 was actually submitted about four years ago.

Chairman Rodriguez questioned what would happen if they increased the budget for next year to \$225,000 and the new bids came lower. Mr. Bonin stated any additional funding would remain in the General Fund.

- ❖ MOTION to increase Account \$10160101-53700 (Contract/Maintenance/ Leases) by \$38,540 adjusting the budget to \$200,000.

Moved by Councilor Ryan, seconded by Councilor Saccone

Discussion: See above.

VOTE: 3– 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED 3 – 0

MOVER: Tim Ryan, Town Councilor

SECONDER: Tony Saccone, Town Councilor

AYES: Jessica Buhle, Tony Saccone, Tim Ryan

✓ ***Capital Improvement Plan:***

The Group discussed the following:

- ***Fire Apparatus Replacement Schedule*** - showed the Capital Account running a deficit by 2031. However, the Finance Committee agreed not increase the appropriation to the Fire Apparatus Replacement Capital Account in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget, noting the overall budget increase.
- ***Master Plan – Needs Assessment***- \$125,000 – Councilor Buhle questioned what if they do not spend the full amount for the Master Plan Needs Assessment. Finance Director Matthew Bonin stated that the funding would remain in the Parks & Recreation Capital Account that was funded by the Conveyance Fees.
- ***Fire Alarm System Replacement*** \$275,000 – High School – Councilor Buhle questioned cost to replace the Fire Alarm System, noting that Mayor reduced the \$350,000 that Board of Education requested to \$275,000. Superintendent Hartling stated that he would look into the cost to replace the High School Fire Alarm System and provide the information Councilor Buhle requested.
- ***School Security – Bullet Resistance Film*** – Bullet resistant film would be applied to the windows of all entry doors.
 - ✓ High School: \$15,000
 - ✓ Juliet W. Long School: \$ 5,000
 - ✓ Gales Ferry School: \$ 9,000
 - ✓ Central Office: \$ 3,000
 - Total: \$32,000

- **Enclosed Bird Nesting Locations** - \$15,000 - Superintendent Hartling stated that birds were nesting in three areas above entry doors at the High School. This creates a large amount of droppings on the sidewalk under these areas, and the need to continuously clean. It was also a health issue to anyone using these entrances. Solid panels will be installed to cover the existing decorative cement block to prevent birds nesting.
- **Juliet W. Long Classrooms** – \$135, 000 - Superintendent Hartling stated that work would begin in 2026 to bring the Juliet W. Long School up to the standards that more closely match the needs of today's learning environment.(Four Year Funding Plan: 2026: \$135,000; 2027: 135,000; 2028: 135,000 – **Total Request: \$405,000**)
- **High School Scoreboard** - \$55,000 - Replace Scoreboard at Multi-Sports Field. The new turf field was a multi-sports field which included: football, soccer and lacrosse. The existing scoreboard was set up for football only. There was a possibility that with the installation of the new Multi-Sport Scoreboard that the Vendor would move the existing scoreboard to Crandall field at no cost.
- **High School Baseball Field** - \$45,000- The current playing surface is unlevel creating bumps and holes where the ball can jump off the ground. These unexpected movements of the ball are dangerous and can create injury. These funds will be used to re-grade the field to eliminate the bumps and realign the bases. Also the field irrigation will be looked at.
- **Gallup Hill School Driveway** - \$30,000 - Since construction there is an area across from the dumpsters that groundwater has been coming up along the curb. This creates a hazard during the winter with constant ice forming between the curb and across the driveway to the dumpsters. The pavement was cracking and needed attention. This funding would install a dry well type structure and pipe to flow over to the storm drain manhole. Funds will also be used to repair the damaged asphalt.

❖ MOTION to remove the following from the Capital Plan for Fiscal Year 2025/2026:

\$55,000 – High School Scoreboard

\$45,000 – High School Baseball Field

\$30,000 – Gallup Hill School Driveway

\$130,000 Total Reduction

Moved by Councilor Ryan, seconded by Councilor Buhle

VOTE:

3– 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED 3 – 0

MOVER: Tim Ryan, Town Councilor

SECONDER: Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor

AYES: Jessica Buhle, Tony Saccone, Tim Ryan

- **Computer Equipment; Technology & Server Upgrade** - \$71,500 – Councilor Buhle questioned whether MIS Director Justin Dube planned to use this money in the coming year. Finance Director Matthew Bonin explain that in Fiscal Year 2012-2013 the Computer & Server Replacement Sinking Fund was established for the entire Town

Government Organization. He stated that this account has been underfunded in the past. He noted that this Capital Account provided funding to meet the yearly PC replacement schedule. He stated if the Server or the computers go down they cannot operate at Town Hall.

- ❖ MOTION to move the Board of Education Healthcare in the total amount of \$6,594,790 back into the General Government side for Fiscal Year 2025/2026 as follows: \$6,069,790 for Board of Education Active Employees and \$525,000 for Board of Education Retirees.

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor Saccone

Discussion: Councilor Saccone stated although he agreed with recording the Board of Education Employees Healthcare Expenses and School Nurses on the education side of the budget ledger that he did not agree with making the move in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget. He suggested they wait to the following year (fy 26/27) to move these expenses to the education side of the budget ledger, noting that it would give the Board of Education and School Superintendent Hartling 18 months to evaluate their needs, so they could plan accordingly.

Councilor Ryan stated by recording the Board of Education Employees Healthcare Expenses on the General Government side of the budget ledger that they were not accurately accounting for the School District's operational cost; and it was not transparent for residents to understand where their tax dollars were being spent. He stated that it made sense for these expenses to be recorded in the budget that they were supporting. He went on to state that they may not be in these positions when the Fiscal Year 2026/2027 Budget is prepared.

Councilor Buhle stated that she agreed that the Board of Education Employees Healthcare Expenses should be reflected on the education side of the budget ledger. However, she stated that two-weeks was not enough time to have the conversations needed to implement such a change. She stated that moving the Board of Education Employees Healthcare Expenses back to the education side of the budget ledger should be discussed in advance of preparing the Fiscal Year 2026/2027 Budget.

Councilor Ryan stated that this was simply a pass through of funds and he noted that the three of them may not be in these positions when the Fiscal Year 2026/2027 Budget is prepared. He addressed the importance for the Finance Committees of the Town Council and Board of Education to have regularly scheduled joint meetings throughout the year to discuss these types of issues.

VOTE: 3– 0 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVED 3 – 0

MOVER: Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor

SECONDER: Tony Saccone, Town Councilor

AYES: Jessica Buhle, Tony Saccone, Tim Ryan

- ***Board of Education Fiscal Year 2025/2026 \$40,667,242***

Councilor Ryan noted in Board of Education Chairman Favry's Budget Letter dated February 24, 2025 he stated that 70.2% of the proposed education budget increase was tied to maintaining required services and fulfilling contractual agreements. He stated just for conversation purposes that of the Board of Education's proposed \$2.3 million increase that \$1.7 million was for maintaining the required services, and fulfilling contractual agreements. Therefore, he stated that it would mean about \$669,000 of the budget was in play for programmatic improvements, and for various things that will improve the schools and student-facing services. He stated that he was not saying that they should get rid of that funding, however, he stated to maintain the schools that \$1.7 million was untouchable.

Councilor Buhle questioned whether Councilor Ryan was suggesting they eliminate the \$668,939 additions that were listed in the **Green Box** in the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget (see page 7 above) , noting that it included a lot of really great additions to programs.

Councilor Ryan stated because the Town Council cannot tell the Board of Education which accounts or items they should reduce or eliminate, that they would not know whether a proposed decrease would negatively impact those the items in the **Green Box** (see page 7 above). Therefore, he stated that Councilor Buhle was making his argument for the reason to have two separate budgets (Town Budget and Board of Education Budget). He stated that he agreed that some of these programs and facility improvements were important; which was why he would have liked to have seen a more detailed breakdown of the Board of Education's expenses. However, he stated that the Town Council does not have a choice.

Councilor Ryan continued by stating that if the Town Council chooses to reduce the Board of Education budget for example by \$667,000; or \$300,000 that perhaps most of the items in the **Green Box** (see page 7 above) would go away and perhaps some things would stay, and perhaps they may find some other efficiencies.

Superintendent Hartling stated that Ledyard's School District was on a shoestring; and to Councilor Buhle's point, that most school districts in the State of Connecticut has the things the Board of Education has proposed in the Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget; and were programs the 2,400 children in the Ledyard School District deserve to have access to.

Councilor Ryan stated that Ledyard had great schools, the staff does an great job; and that he agreed with the many programs they wanted to enhance. However, he stated that it was tough to balance these costs with continuing to place huge increases on their taxpayers, because if they do that they were going to end up not having taxpayers.

Councilor Ryan went on to state although they have managed to keep the tax increase fairly reasonable over the past few years, that Ledyard already had one of the highest mil rates in this region, with the exception of Norwich.

Councilor Buhle stated if we do not fund our schools at a point that keeps up with neighboring municipalities, that Ledyard would become a less desirable community to live in. She stated that people would perhaps choose to live in Stonington, where they fund their schools, and they have STEM Programs, and they have enough parents for their special education program, and they have everything that they need. She stated that Ledyard is not overspending, noting that we do not have a *Spending Problem*, we have a *Grand List Problem*.

Councilor Ryan stated that they could deliberate all night, stating that he was not in favor of a 6% budget increase and that everyone needed to be challenged. He stated the General Government has been challenged; and that the Board of Education should also be challenged because 6% budget increases were not sustainable.

- ***Grand List***

The Finance Committee agreed that because Ledyard does not have much of a commercial and industrial tax base, that their homeowners were left with paying higher taxes than homeowners in neighboring communities.

- ***Property Revaluation- 2025***

Councilor Ryan stated that currently a Revaluation was underway, however, he stated that the updated property values would not make a difference in the Grand List until the Fiscal Year 2026/2027. He stated that the Grand List being used for the Fiscal Year 2025/2026 was based on the assessed value of property from the 2020 Revaluation. Therefore, he stated that most of the assessments that make up the current Grand List do not reflect values that were anywhere close what their homes were actually valued today, noting that the assessed value on the average home in Ledyard was probably close to \$210,000. Therefore, he stated when the 2025 Revaluation becomes effective, that ideally property values would go up and the mill rate would drop.

Assistant Finance Director Ian Stammel addressed the 2025 Revaluation, and he noted that residents would not see a decrease in their taxes because the 70% assessed value would remain the same (70%), noting that it would just be a different abstract value. He stated a 5% budget increase would still be a 5% change for the homeowner.

The Finance Committee questioned with the adjustments made this evening what the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget was.

Finance Director Matthew Bonin noted the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget was in the amount of \$71,062,246. Comprised of a General Government Budget of \$30,394,998; and Board of Education Budget of \$40,667,242.

Assistant Finance Director Ian Stammel stated the budget would require a 37.97 Mil Rate, which was an increase of 2.76 mils.

- ❖ MOTION to recommend the Town Council adopt a proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget in the amount of \$71,062,240 comprised of:

- General Government: \$30,394,998
- Board of Education: \$ 40,667,242

Moved by Councilor Buhle, seconded by Councilor Saccone

Discussion: Councilor Ryan stated that he would be voting “No” because he would like to see the Board of Education’s increase be lower.

It was noted that this budget approval was to present a proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget at the April 21, 2025 Public Hearing to obtain comments and recommendations from residents. The Town Council would have the opportunity to make additional budget adjustments before submitting the Annual Budget to the voters at the May 20, 2025 Referendum.

VOTE: 2–1 Approved and so declared (Ryan not in favor)

RESULT: APPROVE TO RECOMMEND 2 – 1

MOVER: Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor

SECONDER: Tony Saccone, Town Councilor

AYES: Jessica Buhle, Tony Saccone

NAYES: Tim Ryan

X. ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Ryan moved the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Councilor Buhle

VOTE: 3 - 0 Approved and so declared, the meeting was adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Saccone, Sr.
Committee Chairman
Finance Committee