



TOWN OF LEDYARD
CONNECTICUT
TOWN COUNCIL
HYBRID FORMAT

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Chairman S. Naomi Rodriguez

**MINUTES
FINANCE COMMITTEE
SPECIAL MEETING**

Wednesday, April 23, 2025

6:15 PM

Annex Meeting Room - Video Conference

DRAFT

- I. **CALL TO ORDER** - The Meeting was called to order by Committee Chairman Councilor Saccone at 6:15 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	6:15 pm	6:47 pm
Tim Ryan	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person	6:15 pm	6:47 pm
Tony Saccone	Town Councilor	Present	In-Person	6:15 pm	6:47 pm
S. Naomi Rodriguez	Town Council Chairman	Present	In-Person	6:15 pm	6:47 pm
Fred Allyn, III	Mayor	Present	In-Person	6:15 pm	6:47 pm
Bill Barnes	Town Councilor	Present	Remote	6:15 pm	6:47 pm
Matthew Bonin	Finance Director	Present	In-Person	6:15 pm	6:47 pm
Jason Hartling	Superintendent of Schools	Present	In-Person	6:15 pm	6:47 pm
Earl (Ty) Lamb	Board of Education Finance Committee Chairman	Present	Remote	6:15 pm	6:47 pm
Roxanne Maher	Administrative Assistant	Present	Remote	6:15 pm	6:47 pm

III. **BUSINESS OF THE MEETING**

1. **Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget**

Councilor Saccone stated in accordance with Chapter VII; Section 5 of the Town Charter a Public Hearing regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget was held on Monday, April 21, 2025, noting that the purpose of tonight's meeting was to review residents comments and determine if any additional budget adjustments should be made prior to the Town Council voting to submit the budget to the townspeople at the Annual Town Meeting scheduled for May 19, 2025 that would adjourn to a vote on the voting machines on May 20, 2025.

Councilor Saccone stated during the April 21, 2025 Public Hearing that he presented the General Government's proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget in the amount of \$30,394,998; and School Superintendent Hartling presented the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget in the amount of \$40,667,242. He stated of the 5 or 6 residents who attended the Public Hearing only one resident provided comments, and one resident had a question, noting that they did not have a good turnout. He expressed concern regarding the low attendance at the Public Hearing explaining that the purpose of the Public Hearing was for residents to provide comments and or recommendations regarding the proposed budget on behalf of themselves and their neighbors.

Councilor Saccone went on to state the Mayor submitted his proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget to the Town Council on March 3, 2025 (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 on March 6, 10, & 18, 2025 to meet with the Mayor and Department Heads.

Councilor Saccone stated when the Mayor received the budget requests from his Department Heads and from the Board of Education that the budget was calling for a 5 mil increase. He stated the Mayor did a good job to reduce expenses and presented a proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget to the Town Council calling for a 3.15 mil increase. He went on to note that the Finance Committee reviewed the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budgets with the Department Heads line by line and worked to further reduce the Budget increase. He stated the proposed Fiscal Year Budget in the amount of \$71,062,240 was calling for a 2.76 mil increase; for a projected Mil Rate of 37.97.

Councilor Saccone stated although the projected 2.7 mil increase was a large increase that 60% to 70% of the costs were contractual and were out of their control. He explained that the Finance Committee worked to balance the inflationary costs for operational expenses with the projected decreases in revenue. He noted that the 2024 total net Grand List in the amount of \$1,311,231,566 saw a 0.51% decrease or a \$6,699,094 loss in assessed value. He stated this was mostly driven by the State's motor vehicle modified depreciation schedule and motor vehicle tax cap, as well as the new Veterans Property tax exemption that has resulted in a \$520,000 reduction in tax revenues, as well as less grant funding coming in from the State, noting that it was the perfect storm.

Councilor Saccone stated that he understands how the 2.7 mil increase would affect homeowners, noting that he lived on Richard Road and that he supported the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget in the amount of \$71,062,240; comprised of a General Government of \$30,394,998 4.24% increase; and a Board of Education \$40,667,242; an increase of 5.98%.

Councilor Ryan stated that he was also disappointed that they did not have more residents attend the April 21, 2025 Public Hearing. He stated that Mr. Mike Cherry was the only resident that provided comments, noting that he had some interesting things to say, which he took were in support of the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget. He noted that it was his opinion that Mr. Cherry was in support of transitioning the Board of

Education Healthcare expenses from the General Government side of the budget ledger back to the Board of Education side of the budget ledger. Councilor Ryan stated that he continued to think it made sense for each of their expenses to be properly recorded in their respective areas.

Councilor Ryan went on to state that his feelings on the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget have not changed because he did not think that it was responsible to pass this much of an increase on to the townspeople with two major unknowns: (1) 2025 Revaluation would disproportionately affect households. Councilor Ryan stated because their commercial properties would be paying less property tax; that their single-family houses would be paying more of the town's revenue; and (2) The proposed Legislation that was designed to eliminate the Town's ability to collect personal property tax from the third-party private vendors operating at the Mashantucket Pequot Foxwoods Resort Casino. He explained if this piece of Legislation was approved by the State that Ledyard would see a loss of \$625,000 to \$825,000 in tax revenues from commercial businesses such as the Tanger Outlet, California Pizza Kitchen, Dunkin Donuts, etc.; and Ledyard Residents were going to have a \$625,000 - \$825,000 hole in their revenue budget that they would need to fill.

Councilor Ryan stated because of the unknowns he has been discussing at every meeting that he did not think the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget was a responsible budget increase this year, especially given the fact that surrounding communities have routinely been cited challenging their Board of Education Budgets. He stated that he did not feel that the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget was a great budget to put on Ledyard's residents.

Councilor Ryan continued by addressing the Board of Education's proposed Fiscal Year Budget stating that the Town Council was not allowed to peel apart the education budget line item by line item. However, he stated the Board of Education indicated that 70% of their budget was to maintain services; therefore, he stated the other amount was to improve services/programs. He stated that he was in favor of maintaining what we have, and to ever so slightly improve programs/services. He stated during the past five years Ledyard has approved to increase the Board of Education budget every year, with the exception of one year when the budget was flat funded. Therefore, he stated that there has been a steady increase in the school budget. He went on to state this year there were a number of neighboring municipalities that have challenged their Board of Education's budgets, to the tune of millions of dollars which speaks volumes, especially when this Finance Committee did not challenge Ledyard's Education Budget at all; noting that this was a lost opportunity. However, he stated that they would have to see how the vote goes, noting that Ledyard's taxpayers would have to pay 70% of the revenues to support the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget.

Mayor Allyn, III, stated that he was stunned by the lack of turnout at the April 21 2025 Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget Public Hearing. He stated with the projected 2.7 mil increase, which was going to probably be the highest mil rate increase in the last 20 years, they moved the venue to the Middle School to have more space because he thought the proposed budget would generate more interest from the voters. He stated with the low attendance they could have held the Public Hearing at the Council Chambers.

Mayor Allyn went on to note that neither of the two people that spoke, which was former Mayor Mary McGrattan and resident Mike Cherry had a real issue with the proposed Budget. He went on to note in talking with a couple of residents that attended the Public Hearing they stated the following:

- The Town should not have Public Hearings on nights that kids have sports.
- Did not know the Town was having a Public Hearing regarding the Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget.

Mayor Allyn noted that these comments were nothing new, stating that the Town has done everything they could to get the word out about the Annual Budget Process and the upcoming meetings. He noted that in addition to all the meetings being available on the Town's Meeting Portal that the public could access via their computer, smart phone or tablet 24/7; that the Public Hearing was Noticed in The Day Newspaper, in the Events Magazine, on the two Digital Message Boards (Gales Ferry & Ledyard Center); and that he posted it on his social media page, as well as being discussed at multiple meetings. However, he stated that his counterparts at Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments (SCCOG) have all expressed the same concerns that residents say that they did not know about the Public Hearing. He went on to state that the Annual Budget Process was not new, noting that since the first Town Charter was adopted in 1971 the Town has held their Budget Public Hearing in April and the Annual Town Meeting has been held on the third Monday in May with the Referendum on the voting machines the following day (Tuesday). He stated that he hoped that they could get the residents attention for the May 20, 2025 Referendum Vote; because in addition to the Budget, the townspeople were also being asked to vote on a request to increase the Bond Authorization to move forward with the Juliet W. Long School Heating Ventilation & Air Conditioning (HVAC) Project.

Councilor Buhle stated that she was also disappointed with the low turnout at the April 21, 2025 Public Hearing regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget. She stated that she and Councilor Brunelle and the Community Relations Committee for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion have been working hard to expand awareness on how to use the meeting portal and the town website to be informed of town meetings and events. Councilor Buhle went on to state in speaking with her neighbor Mr. Mike Cherry after the April 21, 2025 Public Hearing about the low turnout that Mr. Cherry also noted the very low turnout at all of the Budget Work Sessions (March 6, 10, 18, 2025).

Councilor Buhle went on to state in defending the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget that what the Finance Committee has put forward to the Town Council was not the budget that was put in front of them. She stated that while she understood Councilor Ryan's concerns that the only other budget adjustments they could make at this point was to the Board of Education Budget, that she felt that the Finance Committee has done everything else.

Councilor Buhle continued by noting that she also understands the desire for two separate budgets (General Government and Board of Education); and two separate budget votes. However, she stated that they have to work within the system they currently have in place.

Councilor Buhle addressed the Board of Education's Budget noting that she strongly felt that they put in a lot of work to prepare the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget because it included programs that Ledyard needed to remain competitive with other school districts. She stated that she wanted Ledyard to have a great school system that people want to live in this town for. She also noted that she understood the concerns that they had to balance those costs with their revenues, and the question as to whether Ledyard was still an affordable town to live in. However, she stated that if she was going to arguably pay the highest taxes in the area, then she should have really great schools that were competitive; or better than other schools in the area. She stated the minimal amount of savings in her tax bill was not worth the potential sacrifices that the students would make. She stated the 0.98% reduction to the Board of Education 5.98% increase that Councilor Ryan proposed at the Town Council's April 9, 2025 would amount to \$5 bucks a month in her tax bill noting that she realized that she was in a privileged position to be able to handle the additional tax increase. She stated that it was her personal opinion that the proposed Fiscal Year 2025//2026 Budget represented all of the town's needs.

Councilor Buhle continued to state that Ledyard does not have a spending problem they have a revenue problem. Therefore, she stated that the town continues to seek alternate funding through grants and other sources, which included their efforts to seek business development. She stated by increasing the town's business tax revenues that it would help to lower the residential tax burden and would allow them to move forward with the items on the Board of Education's *Green List*.

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

Councilor Ryan stated that he agreed with Councilor Buhle on the following:

- (1) Ledyard had an income problem. Councilor Ryan stated they would benefit tremendously from an increase in industrial and commercial development taxation, noting that a lot of their neighbors benefit from their commercial and industrial tax base.

- (2) The General Government proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget had no fat.
- (3) Town Council has to work within the current structure they have in place. Councilor Ryan stated this was the reason he thought the Finance Committee did not challenge the Board of Education's Budget enough.

Councilor Ryan continued by addressing revenues noting the following:

- **Revaluation 2025** – Councilor Ryan stated that currently the 2025 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 Budget. He stated that the Grand List being used for the Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget 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 the today's actual values, 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. However, he with the Revaluation that the middle to lower income households' property assessments would increase by \$200,000 - \$300,000. Therefore, he expressed concern that it would have a disproportionate impact on those who could least afford a tax increase, noting that the budget never goes down.
- **Loss of Property Tax Revenue** - Councilor Ryan noted the following:
 - ✓ Grand List – Councilor Ryan stated the 2024 total net Grand List in the amount of \$1,311,231,566 saw a 0.51% decrease or a \$6,699,094 loss in assessed value.
 - ✓ Motor Vehicle Tax Cap and new Modified Motor Vehicle Deprecation Schedule will reduce personal property tax revenues.
 - ✓ New Veterans Property Tax Exemption- Councilor Ryan stated that the Tax Assessor has projected that new law could result in a loss in a \$520,000 reduction in tax revenues.
 - ✓ Proposed Legislation that would eliminate the Town's ability to collect personal property tax from the third-party private vendors operating at the Mashantucket Pequot Foxwoods Resort Casino. Councilor Rayn stated should this piece of legislation pass that Ledyard Residents were going to have a \$625,000 - \$825,000 hole in their budget that they would need to fill.

Chairman Rodriguez stated that she and the Mayor met with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation (MPTN) Chairman Rodney Butler and Tribal Councilwoman Crystal Whipple last week; and that she hoped those conversations would continue.

Mayor Allyn, III, stated during their meeting with the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation (MPTN) Chairman Rodney Butler and Tribal Councilwoman Crystal Whipple that the subject of taxation was not discussed.

Mayor Allyn continued by addressing the 2025 Revaluation and he stated that property values for commercial and industrial properties were not seeing an increase, noting that they were either flat or seeing a decrease which would mean that a greater share of the taxes would be placed on homeowners. He noted Councilor Buhle's comment that reducing the Board of Education's proposed 5.98% budget increase by 0.98% would only be a difference of \$5 a month. Mayor Allyn stated that he wanted to provide clarification, stating that based on the 2.76 mil increase that his tax bill would increase by \$600. Councilor Buhle stated the point she was trying to make was that the difference between the budget number the Town Council moved forward versus the budget number Councilor Ryan was proposing would have only made a difference of \$5.00 per month in her tax bill. She apologized stating that she understood Mayor Allyn's comments, and she stated that her total tax bill would increase by about \$500.

Councilor Ryan stated with all of the revenue issues mentioned this evening that the 2025/2026 budget was going to be a challenging year. Therefore, he stated that perhaps everybody needed to make some sacrifice, noting that it was his opinion that the optics look bad, but they would see what happens at the Referendum. He stated the in addition to next year's budget that Finance Committee also needed to consider how it would impact the town in the future.

Councilor Saccone noted he had a conversation with State Senator Cathy Osten and that she was pushing for the State of Connecticut to pay Ledyard dollar for dollar for tax revenues lost through the proposed Legislation that would eliminate the Town's ability to collect personal property tax from the third-party private vendors operating at the Mashantucket Pequot Foxwoods Resort Casino. Mayor Allyn stated initially the amount the State was going to pay was much lower. However, he stated that this would be like the Pequot Funding that the State never fully funds. He stated this was a concern because the State Legislators can only commit funding for the next two-budget cycles, noting that there would be different players involved 2, 3, 4-years down the road, and they may question why this town in particular, or that town in particular, was receiving a little more money from the Pequot Fund; and because they do not know they would cut the funding to those particular towns. He stated then Ledyard would have to go back, as they have done in the past to try to receive the funding that was promised to them. He stated that previously Ledyard was receiving \$791,000; and after he went back to Hartford to beg and plead with them, that Ledyard was now receiving \$1,391,000.

Councilor Buhle requested clarification as to which Funding Program the Mayor was talking about. Mayor Allyn stated he was talking about Pequot Fund. He explained as a Host Community that Ledyard should receive more funding than non-host communities because of the impact the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation (MPTN) Reservation and Casino/Resort. He noted some of the impacts were positive, and some impacts were possibly not. Therefore, he stated when the Pequot Fund was implemented that the thought was that Ledyard deserved a greater share, and he stated that the Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation (MPTN) has also been vocal in agreeing that Ledyard should receive more Pequot Funding than other towns in the state. However, he stated the funding from the State was only as good as the biennial budget cycle, and after that all bets were off.

Councilor Buhle addressed the States's upcoming biennial budget cycle relative to the PILOT Funding (Payment In Lieu of Taxes). She questioned whether the 2025 Revaluation would: (1) apply to properties that were covered in in the PILOT Program; (2) whether the PILOT property values would increase; and (3) whether Ledyard was expecting to receive an increase in the PILOT Funding. Mayor Allyn stated this was a difficult question to answer because of some of the properties covered in under the PILOT Program were reservation properties; therefore, he stated that some property values would increase with the 2025 Revaluation; however, other properties may or may not. He stated if Ledyard received their full PILOT Payment that they were owed; it would actually reduce their taxes by about 1.4 mils a year. However, he stated the PILOT Funding that Ledyard was receiving was not anywhere near what it was supposed to be; and he noted that this was not only the case for Ledyard but that it was happening across the State. He noted the State had 1,400+ unfunded mandates; and that the PILOT Program was just one program that was only partially funded. Therefore, he stated for these reasons he had skepticism with the dollar-for-dollar plan that Senator Osten told Councilor Saccone with regard to the proposed Legislation that would eliminate Ledyard's ability to collect personal property tax from the third-party private vendors such as the Tanger Outlet, Dunkin Donuts, California Kitchen Pizza, and other vendors (businesses) operating at the Mashantucket Pequot Foxwoods Resort Casino. He explained because those dollars would be coming from the State and not from the Vendors that were operating at the Mashantucket Pequot Foxwoods Resort Casino that at any time the State could make changes, noting that State Funded Programs were never guaranteed. Therefore, he stated that it did not make any sense stating that it was just a shell game the State of Connecticut was playing and that Ledyard would eventually be on the losing end.

Councilor Barnes ask the Finance Committee for the opportunity to make a comment this evening. He thanked the Finance Committee for the work they have done to prepare the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget. He stated although he thought for the upcoming budget year they may be in the best the position they could be in; and that it would be up to the voters of community to decide; but that he was also troubled. He questioned how they would proceed if the community does not support the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget.

Councilor Barnes continued by noting that "*Advisory Questions*" would be included on the Budget Referendum. He stated while the *Advisory Questions* were not popular with everybody, that he thought that they would provide important feedback. He stated although he was not an expert on the Town Charter that in reading pages 30 & 31 that it talks about the voting process, noting that the Town Charter afforded the Town Council the latitude to present the budget in a way that they see fit. He went on to note as written that he believed that the Town Council had the ability to bifurcate the budget and to ask voters "*Do they approve the Board of Education Budget and Do they approve the General Government Budget*"; as Mayor Allyn, III, has expressed an interest in doing. Councilor Barnes went on to state that regardless of what the Budget Referendum outcome was, there would be several possibilities such as the voters could: (1) approve both budgets, (2) not approve both budgets; (3) approve one budget; and (4) not the other budget. He stated whatever the outcome that it would enable the Town Council to

know exactly where to take action, if a vote comes back “No”. He stated based on the current practice of submitting one budget question to the voters that if the vote comes back “No”; that with the *Advisory Questions* that the Town Council could begin to interpret the responses to the question as some indication of where to act. However, he stated that based on what he read in the Town Charter that the Town Council had the opportunity to present the Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget Referendum in a way that would provide the voters the ability to vote on the individual aspects of the proposed budget. He concluded his comments by stating that he was not an expert on the Town Charter, and so he would leave these options for the Finance Committee to think about and to decide; stating that it would make clear what the voters think about the two components of the budget.

Councilor Ryan stated that he believed that they could ask the “*Advisory Questions*” that the Town Council acknowledged at their April 9, 2025 meeting. However, he stated in the current construct they present a Town-Wide Budget comprised of the two budgets.

Councilor Barnes noted Chapter VII, Section 5; page 31 stated:

*“Town Clerk shall cause to be published in a newspaper having circulation in the Town, a summary of the proposed budget showing anticipated revenues by major sources, and proposed expenditures by functions or departments **in the format prescribed by the Town Council for budget estimates**, and shall also show the estimated amount to be raised by taxation as well as the estimated mil rate necessary to meet the amount to be raised by taxation.....”*

Councilor Barnes stated that currently the Town Council presents the proposed Budget to the town. However, he stated the Town Charter makes no specific indication of how the vote is expected to be implemented. He stated that the Town Charter does not say it must be one line, noting that it says the Town Council had the authority vested in the Charter today. He stated that he would acknowledge that presenting two budget questions on the referendum would be different from their current convention. However, he stated that he would ask the Finance Committee to think about whether this was something the town could do, given the current construct of the policies the town had in place. He asked Mayor Allyn for his thoughts.

Mayor Allyn addressed the format of the General Government proposed budget noting that excel spreadsheets were used which included the following data: (1) three years of past budget history, (2) current year budget; (3) current year to date expenditures, (4) proposed budget; (5) budget change (increase or decrease) both in dollars and percentage. He stated the Government Government’s proposed budget was presented in a format that was vastly different from the Board of Education’s proposed Budget format presentation, which was typically printouts from the Munis Financial System, noting that some may find Munis Printouts fantastic, where others might not.

Mayor Allyn continued to respond to Councilor Barnes’ comments regarding the budget format, and he explained that the Town Council could ask the Board of Education to prepare their proposed budget in the same format as the General Government, because t

he Town Charter does say that the Town Council prescribes the budget format. He stated if the Board of Education used a similar format to provide following data: (1) three years of past budget history, (2) current year budget; (3) current year to date expenditures, (4) proposed budget; (5) budget change (increase or decrease) both in dollars and percentage; that he thought it would be clearer than the Munis printouts they currently provide. He stated that printouts from the Munis Financial System were not user friendly, explaining that Munis was a Governmental and Education Financial System that was designed for the power user, noting that everyone was not a Munis power user, nor should they have to be to look at the budget and understand it. However, he stated that he believed Councilor Barnes' question was more about the actual Budget Referendum Question.

Councilor Barnes stated that he did not see anything in the Town Charter that would bar the Town Council from passing forward to the townspeople two individual budget questions to vote on. He stated that he believed that it was within the Town Council's purview to specify how the budget would be presented at the Referendum. He noted that Chapter 7; Section 1 of the Town Charter stated:

"The Board of Education shall annually prepare a budget submission to include the information required by the Town Council. The Board of Education budget will be submitted via the Mayor so that the budget document submitted to the Town Council represents the total fiscal requirements of the Town...."

Councilor Barnes stated that based on this language the General Government Budget and the Board of Education Budget have to be presented to the Town Council together. However, he stated that it does not mean that the Town Council had to present the budgets to the town that way. He noted that the point he was trying to make was in his reading of the Town Charter that the Town Council had the latitude to collect the vote on the budget in a way that they would see fit. However, he stated that perhaps they should obtain a legal opinion.

Councilor Buhle stated that personally she really liked the *Advisory Questions* as an addition to the Budget Referendum Question. She noted as an example that she believed that the Cannabis Dispensary was an Advisory Question, and she asked that she be corrected if she was wrong. She stated while the Cannabis Dispensary was approved that Ledyard does not have a Cannabis Dispensary in town. Therefore, she stated that she thought the Budget *Advisory Questions* were important because for years they have questioned what if the budget failed. She stated with the Advisory Questions that if the Budget failed they would know that it was because the townspeople wanted more investment in the schools and/or it was because people wanted the general government budget cut. Therefore, she stated that she thought the *Advisory Questions* would be very helpful, noting that they would also answer what Councilor Barnes was looking for.

Councilor Buhle went on to state that voting “*Yes or No*” for the budget, and not filling out the *Advisory Questions* was still valid, noting that it would give them a little more opportunity without having to go through contacting the Town Attorney and Bifurcating the Budgets. She stated that she was not disagreeing with Bifurcating the Budget. However, she stated they were 28 days out from the Budget Referendum, and that they should never let a good crisis go to waste, noting that this sounded like a manufactured crisis because we have never had Budget *Advisory Questions* before, at least in her experience.

Administrative Assistant Roxanne Maher addressed Councilor Buhle’s comment regarding the town never having Budget Advisory Questions before, and she stated the Town has from time to time included Advisory Questions on the Budget Referendum for many years. She explained the purpose of tonight’s Special Finance Committee meeting was to review the residents comments regarding the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget that were received at the April 21, 2025 Public Hearing and to consider making additional budget adjustments; and to forward a proposed budget to the Town Council for their review and consideration. She explained that discussions regarding the budget format and bifurcating the budget should have been addressed much earlier in the budget preparation process. She stated that the Town Council would need to vote on a final proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget at their meeting later tonight noting that in accordance with the Town Charter the proposed Budget must be filed in the Town Clerk’s Office on the first Monday in May, which was May 5, 2025. She noted the work involved once the Town Council approved a budget to forward to townspeople that included preparing the budget booklet, legal notices for the newspaper and town webpage, etc.

❖ 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 noted as has stated a few times during their budget deliberations, that he does not agree with the current overall budget, specifically with the Board of Education’s proposed Budget increase. He stated that he thought the Finance Committee should have challenged the Board of Education’s budget more; and therefore, he would be voting “*No*” because he would like to see the Boad of Education’s budget increase be lower.

It was noted that the proposed budget would be forwarded to the Town Council for their consideration. Based on the Town Council’s action at their April 23, 2025 meeting the proposed Fiscal Year 2025/2026 Budget would be presented to the townspeople at the May 19, 2025 Annual Town Meeting, that would adjourn to a Referendum Vote on May 20, 2025.

VOTE: 2– 1 Approved and so declared

RESULT: APPROVE TO RECOMMEND 2 – 1

MOVER: Jessica Buhle, Town Councilor

SECONDER: Tony Saccone, Town Councilor

AYES: Jessica Buhle, Tony Saccone

NYES: Tim Ryan

X. ADJOURNMENT

VOTE: Councilor Ryan moved the meeting be adjourned, seconded by Councilor Buhle
3 - 0 Approved and so declared, the meeting was adjourned at 6:47 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anthony Saccone, Sr.
Committee Chairman
Finance Committee