

Re: **Hartland Board of Finance Public Budget Hearing**
Date: May 4, 2026
Time: 8:00pm
Place: Multi-Purpose Room, Hartland School, 30 South Rd., East Hartland

Attendance: Tom Kean, Chairman, John Ferro, Vice Chairman, Nicole Bernabo, Philip Groth, Tim Irwin, Fletcher Smith. Alternates: Deborah Gilpin, Mike Ryan
Others: Magi Winslow, First Selectman, Scott Levan, Second Selectman, Greg Sottile, Third Selectman, Imma Canelli, Hartland School Superintendent, Karen Eseppi, Treasurer, Linda Krish, Hilary Wilson, along with members of Hartland Board of Education plus numerous Hartland residents.

The meeting was called to order at 8:05pm by Board of Finance (BoF) Chairman Kean. The Chairman welcomed participants and introduced Board members, alternates, Town leadership, staff and presenters. He also provided a brief overview of BoF mandates and operations.

Budget Presentation Fiscal Year (FY) 2026-2027:

Hartland School Superintendent Imma Canelli presented the proposed Board of Education (BoE) Budget for FY 2026-2027. She made note of the high standards that continue to be maintained by the Hartland school system and that it remains one of the top 10% of schools in the State. She also shared that the Hartland School was named a School of Distinction for the third time in the past seven years (there were no accountability measures for two of the seven years due to the Covid pandemic). She also stated that overall student enrollment remains steady.

Superintendent Canelli provided handouts for attendees and noted this budget proposal is for \$6,234,121 which is a total increase of \$485,431 or 8.44% (.0844) over the current fiscal year budget. The Superintendent explained the majority - 58% or \$282,794 – of the total budget increase is due to costs related to projected needs for Special Education (SPED) students, specifically tuition, para-educators, services and transportation. The remaining 42% of the total increase is primarily attributable to higher expenses such as tuition paid for high school students, employee benefits, contractual salaries and utilities. She also highlighted the number of students receiving SPED services averages 17% across the State of Connecticut, while 31.4% of Hartland's students receive SPED services. Superintendent Canelli noted grant funding was vigorously pursued, and employee benefit and service contract increases were negotiated to keep the proposed BoE Budget as conservative as possible.

First Selectman Magi Winslow commenced the discussion of the Hartland Board of Selectmen (BoS) Budget by acknowledging and extending gratitude to all Hartland's Boards, their respective members and Town staff for their continued selfless work on behalf of Town residents. The First Selectman highlighted that Town leadership has proactively responded to residents' request for increased access to Town Hall services by restructuring the main office operations and expanding the operating days and hours. Much of this expansion is tied to attrition and retirements, however, on balance, this change results in increased payroll and benefit expenses. First Selectman Winslow stated continuous changes in State mandates for elections also add to the Town's expense burden. Grant funding has been sought and in FY 2026-2027, an unexpected grant for \$250,000 will be received for a playground at Berg Field. The First Selectman told attendees that Town Leadership consistently strives to promote and balance Hartland's growth with implementing cost efficiencies. She presented the proposed BoS FY 2026-2027 budget of \$2,536,732 noting an increase of \$138,494 or 5.77% over the current

BoS FY 2025-2026 budget; she then turned the presentation over to Karen Eseppe, Hartland's Town Treasurer.

Town Treasurer Eseppe provided several handouts for attendees to review the proposed Hartland FY 2026-2027 annual budget. The total proposed budget for FY2027 is \$8,770,853; \$6,234,121 for the Board of Education (BoE) component and \$2,536,732 for the Board of Selectmen (BoS) component.

Treasurer Eseppe noted that based upon recent revaluations, the total grand list will increase by approximately 36.3%. Further, she stated if the proposed FY 2026-2027 budget passed as submitted, then the mil rate could decrease by 5.7mils; however, she stressed the BoF sets the mil rate after the budget is passed.

Chairman Kean summarized the FY 2026-2027 Budget presentations and recommended supporting the proposed budget as submitted. He then opened the hearing to take questions and input from attendees. The following summary information was provided in response to audience questions and input:

- Question: Would there be any effect to the town of Hartland regarding the recent legislation about home schooled students. Answer: Superintendent Canelli responded that there would be none at this point in time.
- The cost to the Town for each high school student attending Region 7 is \$31,405 per year; the cost for each student attending Granby is \$23,053 and for each student attending Simsbury the cost is \$22,835 per year.
- Connecticut had an additional \$217M of funding to provide Towns across the State. The town of Hartland was granted approximately \$42,000 in supplemental educational aid.
- The Town pays 85% of employee health benefits to attract and retain quality staff and to remain competitive in the job market; this is critical as salaries the Town offers are generally lower than other towns
- The Annual Town Meeting is scheduled for May 18th, 2026, the budget Referendum will be held on May 27th, 2026. The Treasurer noted that should the budget Referendum vote fail after three Referendums, the budget would revert to the previous year's budget which will negatively impact Town's operations, services and education.
- The Board of Finance sets the annual mil rate after the budget is passed; the vote at Referendum is for the budget, not the mil rate

On behalf of the BoF, Chairman Kean extended appreciation to all attendees.

A motion to adjourn the public hearing was made by Fletcher Smith and seconded by John Ferro.

Vote: Unanimous

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Linda M. Krish