TOWN OF EAST HADDAM
PUBLIC HEARING
MUNICIPAL OFFICE COMPLEX
MEETING ROOMS 1 & 2
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2026 AT 7:00PM

Attending: T. Gelston, T. Sevigny, A. Minikowski; R. Skinner, K. Staehly, L. Zemienieski, and other members of the public

1. Call to Order: First Selectman Gelston called the public hearing to order at approximately 7:03 p.m. The attendees recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Purpose of the Public Hearing: Mr. Gelston read the notice of public hearing, stating that the purpose of the hearing was to review, discuss, and obtain public input regarding proposed revisions to Chapter 30 of the Town Code concerning the Code of Ethics. He advised that the notice identified the Municipal Office Complex, Meeting Rooms 1 and 2, as the hearing location and stated that the proposed revised ordinance is available on the Town website and that the hearing was being broadcast live on YouTube. Members of the public were asked to state their names before making comments or asking questions.

3. Review of Proposed Code of Ethics Revisions: Mr. Gelston explained that the draft had undergone substantial review with the ethics attorney retained by the Ethics Commission and the Town Attorney. He stated that a clean copy of the proposed revisions had been posted on the Town website. Mr. Gelston advised that an additional proposed change to page 9, concerning false statements, would be presented during the hearing.

4. Public Comment and Discussion

   Rebecca Skinner offered two recommendations regarding the proposed ordinance:

   - Consultants: Ms. Skinner recommended that Section 2 be expanded to include Town consultants, at least with respect to provisions relevant to the work they perform for the Town. She noted that consultants may have access to confidential information or appear before Town boards. A Board member responded that consultants should be added. Ms. Skinner submitted a letter outlining her recommendations for the record.

   - Ethics Commission vacancies and inability to act: Ms. Skinner recommended that the ordinance establish a contingency for situations in which vacancies prevent the Ethics Commission from obtaining the four affirmative votes required for findings of probable cause or evaluation or otherwise leave the Commission without a quorum. She also asked that the ordinance address circumstances in which the person, or body designated as the fallback decision-maker, is itself involved in the complaint, to avoid a conflict of interest.

   Kevin Staehly recalled that the issue raised by Ms. Skinner had been considered during earlier work on the revisions but that a solution had not been identified. Board members discussed the importance of maintaining a full Commission and having alternate members available. It was

noted that the Commission currently has four members, with one regular appointment vacant. If the ordinance is passed at Town Meeting two alternate positions will also be available. The possibility of contacting an interested applicant before the Commission's November 4th meeting and pursuing additional recruitment for alternate members was discussed.

Mr. Gelston noted that the ordinance contains procedural timelines and that a lack of a quorum could prevent a complaint from being heard or decided within those timeframes. The discussion also recognized the difficulty of recruiting eligible volunteers because of restrictions on other public and political service. The Board indicated that it would seek further input from the attorney on possible solutions. It was emphasized that the public hearing was for comment and was not a vote on the ordinance.

Kevin Staehly raised concerning page 6, Section 4-6(A), subsection 4. He observed that the sentence beginning "*The appearance does not seek*" appeared to state that the appearance does not seek a benefit or consideration "from any applicant." He recommended revising the wording so that it states that the appearance does not seek "*for any applicant*" a benefit, exception, or consideration beyond what Town policy or regulations make available to similarly situated applicants. His concern was that the provision was intended to address preferential treatment, rather than bribery. Mr. Gelston stated that the issue would be brought to Attorney Weaver's attention.

5. Proposed Revision Regarding False Statements

Mr. Gelston reviewed the existing language Section IX item 2.B. on page 9, which provided for a fine of up to $1,000.00 and imprisonment of up to one year for an intentional false statement made by a complainant, under Section 53a-157b of the Connecticut General Statutes.

The proposed replacement language was read into the record. It was noted that the penalty(ies) would apply to a person who intentionally makes a false written statement in a complaint or other written statement submitted to the Commission under oath, or on a form bearing the notice required by Section 53a-157b, when the person does not believe the statement to be true and intends to mislead the Commission or its members in the performance of their official duties. The proposed language identifies the conduct as a false statement and provides for a fine of up to $2,000.00 and/or imprisonment for up to one year, as a Class A misdemeanor. It also requires each complaint form prescribed by the Commission to bear the statutory notice that false statements are punishable.

Mr. Gelston asked whether there were objections to the proposed language. No objection was raised in the discussion, and Mr. Staehly commented that the rationale was sound. The proposed language was viewed as stronger and adequately addressed the subject.

6. Closing Comments: The Board acknowledged that additional work remained in response to the comments raised by Ms. Skinner. Mr. Gelston expressed appreciation for the Board's work throughout the lengthy revision process and stated that it was encouraging to see the proposal reach a public hearing. Mr. Gelston thanked the Ethics Commission for its participation, initiative, and effort, and commented that the proposed ethics language was among the most complete in the state.

7. Adjournment: There being no further comments, Mr. Gelston declared the public hearing closed at approximately 7:24 p.m.

Recorded

Respectfully submitted,
Todd H. Gelston, First Selectman

Items for Follow-Up

- Refer the recommendation to include Town consultants in Section 2 to the Town Attorney for review.
- Obtain legal guidance on a contingency process if the Ethics Commission cannot act because of vacancies or lack of a quorum, including safeguards where a proposed fallback decision-maker has an interest in the complaint.
- Bring the suggested wording revision to page 6, Section 4-6(A), subsection 4, to Attorney Weaver's attention.
- Continue efforts to fill the vacant regular Commission seat and recruit alternate members.
- Incorporate and review the proposed page 9 language concerning false statements.