TOWN OF HAMDEN, CONNECTICUT

Memorial Town Hall
2372 Whitney Avenue
Hamden, CT 06518

Finance Commission Minutes

Regular Meeting

6:00 PM, September 3, 2026

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1. CALL OF THE MEETING AND TAKING OF THE ROLL

The meeting was called to order by Chair Commissioner R. Scolnic at 6:01 PM.

The Clerk called the roll, and the following members were:

Present:

Commissioner Rabbi Benjamin Scolnic, Chair
Commissioner Michael Martin
Commissioner Arnold Margolis
Commissioner Thomas Fortuna

Absent:
Commissioner Myles Carter-Solomon, *Youth*
Commissioner Bethany McCluster

Also in attendance were Walter Morton and Dr. Mario Ciccarini, Hamden Board of Education Member; Briana J. Belton-Robinson, Boards and Commissions Clerk; and 10 members of the public joining virtually.

2. APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

Chairman R. Scolnic requested a motion to adopt the minutes from Thursday, August 6th, 2026.

The motion was made by T. Fortuna and seconded by Commissioner M. Martin.
Vote by Roll Call:

Yes
Commissioner R. Scolnic
Commissioner A. Margolis
Commissioner M. Martin
Commissioner T. Fortuna

No

Absent
Commissioner B. McCluster

Commissioner M. Carter-Solomon, *Youth*

The motion passed.

- **Roll Call Vote Summary:** Yes 4, No 0, Abstentions 0, Absent 2

3. PUBLIC INPUT SESSION

Dr. Mario Ciccarini of the Hamden Board of Education asked about the Finance Commission's role and authority in the Town of Hamden.

Chairman R. Scolnic stated that the Finance Commission has “no teeth” under the Town Charter and that there remains uncertainty regarding the scope of the Commission’s role and authority.

Commissioner T. Fortuna said the previous Finance Commission had walked away and expressed concern that the current Commission may also be approaching a point where members consider abandoning it.

Commissioner T. Fortuna further stated that, in his view, the current Town administration is focused on “keeping the lights on.” He discussed an assumption that Town officials may be anticipating a default that could result in intervention or takeover by the State of Connecticut.

Chairman R. Scolnic discussed efforts to establish a task force and/or long-range planning committee. He stated that he had previously spoken with the Town Attorney, who indicated that a clerk would be required to be present in order for the task force and long-range planning committee to formally convene and meet. The Commission subsequently contacted the Town Clerk’s Office and was advised that a clerk could not be provided.

Michael Meeley, a concerned Hamden resident, addressed the Commission regarding the financial burden of property taxes on homeowners. Mr. Meeley urged the Town to consider seeking a bailout from the State of Connecticut to lessen the tax burden on homeowners. He also expressed interest in participating in any future committees established to address the Town’s financial condition.

4. REPORT FROM EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Chair Scolnic noted that the Commission had received consistent participation from the Board of Education and some participation from the Mayor’s Office. He expressed concern about the lack of representation from the Legislative Council and said he had contacted the Council President and the Chair of its Finance Committee about participation. The Finance Commission agenda identifies representatives of the Mayor, Board of Education, and Legislative Council budget committee as ex officio members.

1. Public Official or municipal employee representing the Mayor, designated by the Mayor.
   No report was provided by a representative designated by the Mayor.
2. Representative of the Board of Education, designated by a majority vote of said Board

The Board of Education representative reported that the Board's next meeting was scheduled for September 8, 2026. The Board held a retreat on August 14, during which members worked with the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent to develop draft Board goals for further consideration.

The representative reported that the school year began with positions largely filled and that some employees displaced as a result of budgetary issues had been brought back as other openings became available.

Concerns were raised regarding school transportation at the beginning of the academic year, including students not being picked up as scheduled and experiencing lengthy trips home. The representative stated that the matter would be raised at the upcoming Board meeting to determine the cause of the transportation issues and whether corrective measures were being implemented.

The Commission also discussed school funding priorities and the limited amount of discretionary funding within school district budgets. The Board representative explained that salaries, transportation, and purchased services account for significant portions of the budget and that discretionary accounts may be frozen when other areas exceed projections.

Discussion also occurred regarding competitive grant funding. The representative reported that Hamden had applied for, but did not receive, a recent competitive state grant for additional special education funding. The representative intended to inquire whether the district had received feedback regarding its application so that the information could inform future grant submissions.

3. Chair of the Legislative Council committee of jurisdiction over the budget or a member of said committee designated by the Chair

No report was provided by the Chair of the Legislative Council Budget Committee or their designee.

5. UPDATE REPORT FROM THE MUNICIPAL BOARD AND COMMISSIONS, INVITED GUEST

1. Walter Morton, Director of Government & Community Affairs and Government Relations for Connecticut Energy Marketers Association (CEMA)

Mr. Walter Morton provided a presentation regarding Hamden's current fiscal condition, contributing factors, potential solutions, and examples of municipalities that have undergone fiscal recovery. The meeting agenda identifies Mr. Morton as the invited guest for this portion of the meeting.

Mr. Morton stated that he reviewed historical Town budgets, audits, financial reports, archival materials, and other records to examine the development of Hamden's financial condition. He discussed the historical underfunding of the Town's pension obligations and other financial decisions that, in his assessment, contributed to the Town's current fiscal challenges.

Mr. Morton reviewed Hamden's Fiscal Year 2026–2027 finances. His presentation identified a total budget of $327,811,161, a 53.67 mill rate, approximately $32.55 million in Town and Board of Education debt service, a $28.8 million actuarially determined legacy pension contribution, and approximately $60 million in medical costs.

Mr. Morton identified several contributing factors to the Town's fiscal condition, including the lack of a Town-wide master plan, historical underfunding of pensions, retirement packages, the 2015 Pension Obligation Bonds, fiscal management practices, stagnant Grand List growth, and investment strategy.

Mr. Morton also reviewed the Town's existing debt service, debt-per-capita ranking, Equalized Grand List per capita, and projected legacy pension contributions. The materials presented to the Commission showed increasing projected employer pension contributions through 2044, followed by a substantial decrease in 2045.

Mr. Morton presented several potential solutions for consideration, including development of a long-term Hamden Master Plan involving the Mayor, Legislative Council, and Board of Education; seeking state-backed financial assistance; engaging the Connecticut State Treasurer regarding pension management; engaging the Connecticut State Comptroller regarding medical insurance costs; developing a Town-wide economic development plan; establishing a Board of Education strategic plan; and examining opportunities to consolidate Town and Board of Education services.

Mr. Morton presented case studies involving Springfield, Massachusetts; Chelsea, Massachusetts; and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He discussed how these municipalities addressed significant fiscal challenges through combinations of state assistance or oversight, professional financial management, operational reforms, long-term financial planning, pension and expenditure reforms, and economic development.

Mr. Morton stated that successful municipal recoveries shared several characteristics, including a candid assessment of financial conditions, conditional outside assistance, multiyear financial planning, professional financial capacity, action on long-term liabilities, protection of core services, economic and tax-base renewal, and sustained oversight and public reporting.

Mr. Morton concluded that Hamden should consider pursuing relief through a state-local recovery arrangement in which immediate assistance would be accompanied by a credible path toward structural balance, pension sustainability, stronger financial management, and Grand List growth. He stated that long-term success should include the Town's ability to meet pension obligations, maintain core services, invest in infrastructure, grow the Grand List, and remain affordable without recurring emergency measures.

The Commission thanked Mr. Morton for his presentation and discussed the Town's long-term financial obligations, potential state assistance, pension costs, economic development, and the importance of comprehensive long-term planning.

6. UPDATE REPORT FROM THE FINANCE COMMISSION CHAIR

Chair R. Scolnic discussed the Commission's role as an advisory body and its efforts to facilitate communication among the Town administration, Legislative Council, Board of Education, and other municipal entities.

The Commission discussed efforts to establish smaller working groups or task forces to examine municipal spending and long-range planning. Members discussed procedural requirements associated with convening such meetings, including the need for appropriate clerical support and compliance with Freedom of Information requirements.

Chair R. Scolnic reiterated the importance of long-range planning while addressing the Town's immediate fiscal challenges. Members discussed the need for cooperation among municipal bodies and expressed concern regarding obstacles that had delayed additional meetings and collaborative efforts.

The Commission also discussed information concerning anticipated financial pressures on residents and the potential effects of broader economic and governmental changes on the Town and its residents.

7. EXECUTIVE SESSION

(if recommended by the town attorney)

No Executive Session was held.

8. REGULAR AGENDA

No additional matters were discussed.

9. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

No unfinished business was discussed.

10. NEW BUSINESS

No new business was discussed.

11. ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made and seconded to adjourn the meeting.

The motion passed unanimously.

The Finance Commission meeting was adjourned at approximately **7:15 PM**.

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