

Town of Hampton
Board of Finance
Public Hearing
Wednesday, April 30, 2014
7:30pm
Hampton Town Hall Community Room

Minutes

Call to Order: The public hearing was called to order at 7:37pm by Board of Finance Chair Jeff Clermont.

Members present: Jeff Clermont, Ed Adelman, Nick Brown, Rick Matejka.

Alternates present: Luciann Norton.

Members/alternates absent: Penny Newbury, Dan Meade, Rheo Brouillard, Mike Higgins.

Others present: Selectmen Al Cahill, Bob Grindle, & Mike Chapel, Treasurer Ellen Rodriguez, HES Superintendent Paul Graseck, HES Principal Elise Guari, HES Business Coordinator Sally Lehoux, HES Board of Education members John Burnham, Rose Bisson, Joan Fox, Ann Gruenberg, Maryellen Donnelly, Catherine Wade & Stan Crawford, & Recording Clerk Kathi Newcombe, as well as several audience members.

Luciann was seated for Penny.

Presentation of proposed 2014-15 Budget and Public Input:

Board of Finance (BoF) Chair Jeff Clermont presented the highlights of the bottom line changes in the total budget, as well as that of the General Government (4.51% increase), Hampton Elementary School (5.89% increase) and Parish Hill budgets (3.2% decrease); he also presented the proposed change in the mil rate from the current year, noting that a large portion of the proposed 7.43 mil increase is due to the revaluation. Also presented were the questions of paying off the school roof loan and the town garage loan, and the resulting impact on the fund balance.

1st Selectman Al Cahill presented the General Government budget. The 1st Selectman salary will be adjusted to \$30,000 but not drawn on until the next municipal election. Transfer station personnel salaries were also adjusted to reflect market salaries. All other town employees would receive a 3% Cost-of-living increase. Health insurance has increased primarily due to premium increases.

Wes Wilcox asked if the salary adjustments were more than 3%; Al responded in the affirmative.

Dayna McDermott-Arriola asked why Tax Collector Assistant and Assessor Assistant hours have increased 16-20%; she asked if there were more duties or if the Tax Collector and Assessor were replacing their salary-paid hours with increased assistant hours; Al responded that the assistants were there for backup. Dayna went on to say that the Town Clerk does not have as much in Assistant hours.

Treasurer Ellen Rodriguez noted that the Tax Collector had budgeted the 2013-14 low and that his Assistant had been working at another town, so the office was often closed.

Al went on to note some of the other increases including:

- additional training mandated for the Fire Department, paid for out of Contingency in the current budget;
- an increase in umbrella coverage in the insurance line, bringing the town's coverage to \$10,000,000 from \$5,000,000;

- an increase of \$5,000 to the Contingency line;
- restoration of cuts made last year to the capital accounts of Trucks & Equipment (\$10,000) & Open Space (\$20,000);
- a one-time increase of \$25,000 to the Fire truck capital line.

Al went on to say that he would like to take the \$25,000 out of the operating budget and instead transfer it from the General Fund.

Dayna McDermott-Arriola suggested taking the 1st Selectman additional salary not being paid and use it in place of the increase to Contingency.

Mark Becker asked if the town could get a better deal on health insurance; Al responded that the broker already worked to reduce the increase by almost 50%, and the extra increase in that line is due to replacement of a single coverage with possible family coverage for an employee. Mark also asked about getting the best possible price for oil.

HES Superintendent Paul Graseck presented the HES budget of \$2,257,756, a 5.89% increase. Dr. Graseck made available a number of different handouts including:

- Analysis of the elementary school budget for the last eight years;
- Comparison of the General Government budget with the elementary school budget for the last six years;
- Effect of the ECS grant on the elementary school budget
- PreK-6th grade projections for Chaplin, Hampton & Scotland
- A comparison of HES CMT scores with the state for 2006, 2011, 2012 & 2013
- A chart of the SPI for Hampton for 2013
- A comparison of a number of schools at different SPI rating categories
- Budget comparisons of some single-elementary school districts
- The proposed 2014-15 HES budget

He said the school took a big hit last year; there was an opportunity to seize the moment, lowering the Minimum Budget Requirement on the shoulders of the elementary school. The difference between 2012-13 and proposed 2014-15 budget is \$1,568. The school budget has not kept pace with the town budget increases that he characterized as dramatic. He claimed that the school budget is actually behind because of the new teacher contract. The proposed budget restores all teacher positions but did not restore everything cut last year. The HES Board of Education (BoE) did not want to cut the budget last year to the level needed. The major increases include \$63,000 for teacher restorations and the new teacher contract, insurance up 15%, transportation up a few thousand dollars. Other places had to have decreases. He said there is talk around town that it would be cheaper to close the school. He hopes that it's not just a money-driven decision but that's a factor. In a very small town which does not have a lot of community opportunities, the school is the heart of the town. He claimed students would be second class citizens in any other school. He spoke about Pre-K thru 6 projections presented at the first Malone MacBroom working group meeting showing that the enrollment projections in Chaplin and Scotland are in decline while Hampton's is increasing, and claimed that showed the school census will increase by 24 over the next several years.

Lynn Burdick noted that the number of births listed on one of the handouts are exactly the same for each of the three towns and objected to the use of unreliable figures; Al noted that he questioned those numbers as well at the original working group meeting and has since provided actual birth information for the last three years to the working group. Al said that 2013 saw only eight births in Hampton and there was only one in 2014 thus far.

Supt. Graseck spoke about the School Performance Index (SPI) and wanted to put to rest some of the issues. He reviewed the ratings of schools in CT, and stated that it was the first year of SPI for all

schools, and next year the CMT will go away. There is no baseline so there can be no comparison for two years. He stated that the SPI was meant to be used internally, not for comparison or competition between schools, that the target set was a score of 88 by 2024, each year going up 1/12 of the difference between current SPI and the target each year. He said the very small numbers at the school cause great statistical variation, and skews results dramatically. Competing with other schools. Lots of schools are in the transitioning category. The staff at the school is working very hard to identify performance gaps using three-times-per-year assessments, they can track individual students, They look at students every four weeks and set individual goals. He pointed out that removing the third grade scores would leave the school just half a point away from the target. The staff is analyzing the problem, not pointing fingers at this point. He is prepared to answer all questions on increases in budget.

Principal Elise Guari presented a document explaining two assessment types, summative vs formative. Summative shows how year ended, where work on curriculum may be needed. Measures of Academic Progress is summative and formative, is a Common core aligned assessment given in all grades. Other assessments include Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI) and other assessments are used sporadically. This allows the staff to identify students with needs, mitigate issues, start new goals. The staff has realigning curriculum to meet Common Core standards. They also do parent and staff surveys to measure climate: do they have happy parents and kids, good bus rides, good communication, etc. The students at HES have opportunities not at other schools – nature trail, garden grants, after school clubs and programs. She would like to see the students move academically but also provide a safe culture for them.

There were no further questions.

Al said if the town votes to pay down debt service and take the \$25,000 firetruck repair out of General Fund, his goal is to address the increase in mil rate for budget increases.

HES BoE Chair John Burnham asked if the town approves the debt payoff, would it offset the total increase in the budget, and would it be removed from the budget in future years. Al responded in the affirmative.

Joan Fox asked if the budgets and questions pass, would there be a zero percent tax increase. Luciann explained that the money included in the budget would go back to the General Fund at the end of the next fiscal year. Jeff said the bigger payoff is in future years because the debt service is removed from budget.

Luci stated that it will appear that budget is less by \$200,000 and forget that it was due to the payoff. Jeff said the Board of Finance (BoF) goal moving forward is being fiscally responsible.

Al said he regretted putting the \$25,000 for the fire truck rebuild in the budget. To help offset that, there is over \$18,000 accrued interest on Capital Non-Recurring funds – there will be a question on the call for the annual meeting to sweep those funds to the General Fund to help rebuild the fire truck.

Lynn Burdick said all the birth and enrollment numbers from school study are the same, but the numbers do not follow from one year to the next, Kindergarten does not move to 1st grade, etc. She is unhappy with using the document with obviously inaccurate info.

Dayna McDermott-Arriola asked what the town's Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) is this year, and what impact the drop in census would have; HES Business Coordinator Sally Lehoux responded that either the town could allocate the same total amount for education as last year or RD11 and HES separately could each have no less than a zero increase budget; and vice versa. Only if looking at spending for the town as a whole can the MBR be lowered for reduced census.

Ann Gruenberg thought that Milone MacBroom school study might be looking at housing opportunities as well as birth rate in making their projections.

Lynn Burdick noted that the HES personnel did not review their budget.

Lynn Burdick was upset about some townspeople trying to keep people from speaking at town meetings and keeping info from being disseminated. She said that someone came to one of her family members and asked how to keep her family from attending meetings and speaking out. She spoke about Freedom of speech, the right to vote and to assess and interpret facts being basic rights in this country. She said it would be a legal issue if such a person were deemed to be speaking on behalf of a board or as an elected official. She felt that a salaried employee would have no place making such statements in public. She objected to having her tax dollars spent to pay someone to express personal opinions while serving the town as an official. She said last year the tone was negative about purchasing land or agricultural assessments/abatements for open space and preserving land; the State supports those assessments and exemptions as good for the town and the state. She objects the attacks on farmers for exemptions. She guesses most townspeople would not choose to live here if there were not open space, farmland, the state forests, Joshua's Trust and Audobon. She stated that every acre of open space is an asset to the town, and an acre of open space costs less than an acre with a house on it. She suggests such talk should be put aside for the good of the town.

Dayna McDermott-Arriola spoke again about the lack of work outside tax season or assessments not justifying the increase in the assistants for salaried employees who work only two days per week. She is outraged that no one is asking this question when she has brought it up repeatedly.

Rose Bisson agrees with the 1st Amendment right to speak, and those who object to open space are as entitled to their opinion as anyone else.

Dayna McDermott-Arriola agreed with Rose, but objects to hearing salaried town employees speaking their personal opinions as she has.

Adjourn: The hearing was adjourned at 8:52pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Kathi Newcombe,
BoF Recording Clerk