

Town of Hampton  
Board of Finance  
Special Meeting  
April 28, 2025  
8PM

**Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 8:04PM.

**Roll Call:** Kathy Donahue, Joan Fox, Ed Adelman, Nick Brown, Regina DeCesare, Fran Gustaveson, Kathi Newcombe

Staff and Others Present: First Selectman Allan Cahill, Superintendent Andrew Skarzynski and Board of Education members Mark Becker, Dennis Timberman, Elizabeth Lindorff, and Stephanie Bora, Recording Secretary Dayna McDermott-Arriola

Kathi Newcombe was seated for Diane Gagnon on request.

**Citizen Comments:** Chairman Donahue announced that, in terms of the Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) grant, the Appropriations Committee has proposed holding towns harmless for two more years, but the formula for the reductions remains in the Governor's budget, and there are other uncertainties regarding federal government funding.

In urging the finance board to present the government budget so that all three budgets could be deliberated without further delay, Dennis Timberman stated that the five versions of the elementary school budget were a "best guess", noting that other towns are holding budget hearings and meetings without State and federal information. First Selectman Cahill stated he will not submit multiple versions of the Government budget while waiting for departments to submit their requests. He also stated that some town meetings are scheduled per ordinance, but the State will not adopt a budget until June 5, 2025 at the earliest.

**Regional District #11 and Hampton Elementary School Budget Presentations**

Superintendent Andrew Skarzynski presented the Hampton Elementary School (HES) proposal, explaining that the school's priorities were to maintain programming, meet the social and emotional needs of students, explore shared service opportunities with other districts, fulfill State mandates, improve academic outcomes for students, and reduce referrals to special education. He noted that while 36% of the students tested reached bench mark goals, 26% of the students are identified as requiring special education and 39% require intervention, a number which may include some special education students. The budget, therefore, reflects increased staffing, including the Interventionist position from .6 to full time, and the school counselor from .82 to a full time position. Fixed increases include transportation, special education costs, contractual commitments, and a slight increase due to State changes in the way Pre-Kindergarten is funded.

To Nick Brown's question on the low academic performance, Mr. Skarzynski said that while Covid affected student learning, test scores at HES do not compare favorably with other towns.

Chairman Donahue reported that she met with the Superintendent to discuss possible cost saving measures. These include budgeting for the vacant positions, the Interventionist and the Special Education Director, noting the level RD#11 set for vacant positions -- Masters plus step 3, rather than Masters plus step 12. She also suggested that the 3% Cost of Living Adjustment awarded to administrators and non-contracted staff be reduced to 2.5%, the amount budgeted for municipal employees and Social Security recipients. She also noted that actual expenditures to date suggest that the school could pre-purchase materials for next year with the current year's probable surplus, and noted that other similar small districts often combine administrative roles, such as Principal/Superintendent, and Special Education Teacher/Director. She also stated that the test scores suggest that students should spend more time in the

classroom by reducing physical education from two to one day per week, and offering Chorus, Band, and Drama after-school. She also noted that she has yet to receive the requested current and proposed class schedules. She also inquired as to Mr. Skarzynski's proposed option of increasing the number of paraprofessionals while reducing their hours from full to part time, which would result in providing ten more hours of instructional time per week while saving \$62,000 in health insurance. Mr. Skarzynski stated that the difficulty would be in finding people to fill those positions, given that they are half-time and offer no health insurance. Ms. Donahue responded that a part-time schedule might be preferable for some applicants.

Chairman Donahue also discussed the *Budget History* presented as part of the budget packet, which recorded the percentage increases from 2010 to present, noting that during that time period, the student population decreased from 140 students to the 68 currently enrolled at the school. First Selectman Cahill added that the Town paid the school's debt, and that the major capital projects were also funded through the Town. Chairman Donahue reported that with graduating and incoming students, and those tuitioning to other schools, next year's census is approximately 60 students, excluding any new additions to Pre-School or Kindergarten. She also mentioned the high percentages of tax payers who are senior citizens, some of whom are on fixed incomes, and families whose children qualify for free and reduced lunch, nearly 49%, adding that a reduced budget stood a better chance of passing. She also stated that the cost-saving suggestions preserve the current and additional services provided to students, reminding members that major reductions in the Educational Cost Sharing grant are expected in the future.

Joan Fox calculated a daily amount of .78 in additional taxes if this budget is approved, based on the town's median income of \$92,000; Chairman Donahue countered that the RD#11 and Town Government expenditures are not figured into that amount, and that many residents fall below the median income.

Ed Adelman stated that voters elected members to the school board to make educational decisions, to which Chairman Donahue replied that the finance board was elected to consider and provide oversight of all three budgets when deliberating spending plans.

Kathi Newcombe noted that the town ranks 11<sup>th</sup> in the state in school spending, with a per pupil cost of \$29,900.

Joan Fox inquired as to whether or not there were alternative means of transportation, such as utilizing the services of Uber. Superintendent Skarzynski responded that providing transportation to all enrolled students is a statutory requirement.

Fran Gustavasen asked for the current student configurations and class sizes. Mr. Skarzynski listed the following: 7 students in Kindergarten, 22 students in the combined first and second grades, 14 students in the combined third and fourth grades, and 16 students in the combined fifth and sixth grades. Pre-school numbers are not yet determined for next year as the screening and enrollment process is taking place. It was clarified that as soon as a child is three, they may enroll in the Pre-school class, as Birth to Three special education services cease for children at age three.

Superintendent Skarzynski also presented the Regional District #11 budget proposal, reminding everyone that there is a Public Hearing on the budget on May 5 at 7PM at Parish Hill Middle/High School and a tri-town referendum on May 6 from noon to 8PM. The 3.66% increase in this year's proposal represents contractual salary commitments and special education costs. There is no increase in staffing, and the district continues to look for ways to share services with other districts. Assessments, he explained, are based on the student census for each of the three towns and Hampton's is \$191,255 this year. Mr. Skarzynski noted that the state average increase is 5.2%.

Chairman Donahue inquired as to the use of the school's fund balance to apply to the towns' assessments as in the past, and asked for the amount in that account. Mr. Skarzynski was uncertain of the amount remaining after the school's purchase of a generator, which he believed to be \$81,000. Both Nick Brown and Joan Fox suggested that the tuition rate be increased as RD#11 currently charges only \$8,381 for students who tuition to the school.

**Citizen Comments:**

Maryellen Donnelly spoke in opposition to a plan to increase paraprofessionals and reduce their positions to half-time due to the importance of consistency and continuity for the students.

Dennis Timberman compared the costs of sports and related salaries at Parish Hill and questioned the finance board as to their lack of concern over those amounts. Chairman Donahue said that some schools have instituted a pay-for-play plan and that she regularly attends RD #11 meetings.

Danielle McGiver reported that she reviewed referendum results since 2017 in the Town Clerk's office and reported that the taxpayers never voted against the elementary school budget as was alleged.

Chairman Donahue stated that the taxpayers defeated the school's budget several times during the years represented in the board packet, 2010 to present.

Ms. McGiver and Chelsea Guilmette also asked if they could circulate and submit a petition showing support for the school budget. Chairman Donahue confirmed that they could, but noted that a referendum would be held for approval of all budgets.

**Adjournment:** There being no further business to come before the Board, the Meeting adjourned at 9:30PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Dayna McDermott Arriola  
Recording Secretary

*This is a draft version of the Minutes until approved by the Board of Finance.*