

Town of Hampton
Board of Finance
Public Hearing
May 25, 2023
7:00 PM

Call to Order: The Public Hearing was called to order at 7:04 PM.

Budget Presentations and Public Input on Proposed 2023-24 Town Government and Hampton Elementary School Budgets

Chairman Donahue explained the recent adjustments to the latest draft versions of the budgets. These included a \$5,966 increase to the Hampton Elementary School due to a 10% increase in tuition to the magnet school and an additional student attending. She also explained the separate questions on the ballot: the use of funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to fund Fire Department equipment and an alarm system and to supplement the fee for the Ambulance Service; and the use of the unassigned general fund for Little River Park maintenance as the Town did not receive the State grant for which the Conservation Commission applied.

Nick Brown added that the General Government realized a 22% increase in the costs of elections, a 24% increase in health insurance, a 70% increase to the KB Ambulance Service, and the inclusion of \$100,000 to the Fire Department's Capital & Non-Recurring Account toward the purchase of a new fire truck. He also noted that the town lost \$300,000 in revenue this year and next year for the non-payment of taxes by the Solar Park, the subject of an ongoing lawsuit.

Chairman Donahue then opened the hearing to the public and the following residents made statements:

Dick Brown praised the Town administration for retaining a flat mill rate for many years, but stated that the increase to the Hampton Elementary School's budget is necessary to maintain school programs and, consequently, real estate values.

Juan Arriola suggested the school's budget could be reduced due to two recent retirements of staff, each with 39 years of service. He also called the principal's resignation an opportunity to discuss different administrative models, including combining roles or sharing a principal with another school. He also reminded the school board chairman of her claim that the elementary school could be run as efficiently as a combined school.

In response, Board of Education Chairman Rose Bisson stated that she wasn't referring to costs when she made that statement, and that she would never suggest any reductions in costs that would be detrimental to the students. She challenged the notion that the retirements would result in savings as the Superintendent/Principal model the school employed years ago hadn't worked, and that the hiring of an inexperienced teacher in the dual grade model the school employs could cause the students to lose a year of their education.

Luther Gerlach stated that his family moved from Santa Barbara and selected Hampton for the beautiful, small school his daughter looks forward to attending. He thanked the community.

Mark Becker expressed his frustration with the constant battle to support the school and advocated for improvements and expansions of school programs.

Elizabeth Lindorff supported Mr. Becker's statement.

Irene Brown urged the boards to put the nickels and dimes to rest and work together, citing climate change and political climate as current concerns.

Indu Poonja stated that as a substitute paraprofessional at Hampton Elementary, she witnessed the principal fulfilling the roles of administrator, nurse and counselor, duties which could never be accomplished by a part-time principal.

Kate Donnelly urged the finance board to maintain the school budget as presented, and advocated for increasing it.

Adjournment: With no further questions or comments, the Public Hearing adjourned at 7:25PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Dayna McDermott Arriola
Recording Secretary

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