

Town of Hampton
Board of Finance
Public Hearing
Monday, June 17, 2013
7pm
Hampton Town Hall

Hearing Minutes

Call to Order: The hearing was called to order at 7:05 p.m. by Chairman Rheo Brouillard.

Members present: Chairman Brouillard, Stan Crawford, Margaret Haraghey, and Luciann Norton.

Alternates present: Jeff Clermont.

Members/alternates absent: Dan Meade, Penny Newbury, and Paul Wakely.

Others present: First Selectman Al Cahill, Selectmen Bob Grindle and Michael Chapel, Hampton Elementary School Board of Education Chairman John Burnham, Board of Education Members Rose Bisson, Maryellen Donnelly, Joan Fox, Anne Gruenberg, Carol Misak, and Catherine Wade, Hampton Elementary School Superintendent Paul Graseck, Substitute Recording Clerk Dayna McDermott-Arriola, and audience members.

Motion: Stan Crawford, seconded by Luciann Norton, to seat Jeff Clermont. Motion carried unanimously.

Public Input on 2013-14 Proposed Hampton Elementary School Budget:

Superintendent Graseck distributed the budget proposal approved by the Board of Education, explaining that, while the bottom line remains at the original proposal of \$2,256,188, new realities have necessitated adjustments to certain line items. Revisions to the original proposal were also distributed. Chairman Burnham added that the proposal, a 0% increase over the current year, was deemed reasonable and responsible by board members, and that a review of line items did not reveal areas that could be reduced.

Margaret Haraghey asked if the total appropriation for both the elementary school and the middle/high school could be used in determining the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR). Superintendent Graseck said that recent and multiple conversations with personnel at the State Department of Education verified that there were two ways to calculate the MBR: by considering each school budget separately; or by combining the bottom lines of both budgets. Superintendent Graseck affirmed that because the Regional District #11 budget increased, the Hampton Elementary School budget could decrease, noting that the members of the Board of Education were unaware of this when they approved the latest budget proposal.

Chairman Brouillard and Rose Bisson questioned whether or not the method of calculation needed to be consistent, since the budgets have been calculated separately for the purposes of satisfying the MBR, and the town might be negatively impacted if forced to combine in the future. Superintendent Graseck confirmed that the method of calculation could be determined each year.

Chairman Brouillard reviewed the relevant amounts: the total budgeted educational expenditures for the fiscal year 2012-2013 were \$3,840,044; and the 2013-2014 approved Regional District #11 budget and the elementary school proposal equals \$4,013,183; \$173,139 could potentially be reduced from this year's allocation. Chairman Brouillard stated that there are very few opportunities to reduce the MBR, and that the taxpayers would see this as a chance to "reset the base".

Superintendent Graseck responded that it would be difficult to cut the budget further as it had been a challenge to keep the bottom line stable for the last few years while prices continue to rise. He stated that there were few places to cut significantly beyond personnel. He reminded those present that the school budget had experienced a 2.6% increase over the last four years, and a 4.6% increase over the last six years. He noted, in response to the suggestion circulating in the community that the school should close, that it was unclear as to whether or not that measure would realize long-term savings. Margaret Haraghey questioned the need for administrative raises, reminding board members that town employees lost their 1% cost-of-living increment while school employees retained their 2% raises. She compared the school's chief official, the Superintendent, with the town's chief official, the First Selectman, noting the large disparity between the two salaries. Chairman Burnham defended the raises, stating that the administrative salaries were well deserved, and pointing out that some of the differences in staff compensation was due to an increase of hours and/or responsibilities. Chairman Brouillard asked if the board obtained any information on the possibility of eliminating one of the three buses.

Superintendent Graseck said that the bus company reconfigured the routes for two buses instead of three, and that the duration of the rides made eliminating a bus untenable, as a route could last up to an hour and half to complete.

At this point, Gordon Hansen requested that school officials address the entire room as it was difficult for hearing impaired persons to hear what was said. He requested that in the future speakers address the audience, and perhaps use a microphone, and the meeting proceeded with school officials facing the audience to speak.

Chairman Brouillard asked the Superintendent to explain the process of how the school meets its financial obligations until its budget passes. Superintendent Graseck explained that for the first ninety days, expenditures could be made as authorized by the budget making body, and that after the first ninety days, successive monthly payments in pro-rated amounts could be made in a manner prescribed by the Board of Finance. Chairman Burnham said that, given the proximity to the end of this fiscal year, the new fiscal year would, in all probability, begin in this manner.

Chairman Brouillard asked for the amount of surplus funds the board anticipated from the current year's budget. Superintendent Graseck said that, to date, approximately \$7,000 of unspent monies remain, but there are still some outstanding fees, and any left-over funds would be applied toward maintenance issues.

Chairman Brouillard questioned the projections for future enrollment. Maryellen Donnelly said the latest census revealed that there are 62 children from birth to five years of age currently in the town. She added that good schools draw families. Chairman Brouillard agreed, adding that a secondary consideration for families is the tax burden. Superintendent Graseck said that the lack of industry impacts taxes as well as the costs of education.

Anne Gruenberg mentioned the state-wide trend toward shared resources. Chairman Brouillard pointed out that the increase in charter and magnet schools might impact the student count, as families currently paying tuition for parochial and private schools might choose charter and magnet options, and these tuitions would be included in the local school budgets.

In closing, Superintendent Graseck commented on the positive changes and improvements in the school. He said he wouldn't want an adversarial relationship between the school and other town agencies to develop.

Adjournment

Chairman Brouillard adjourned the hearing at 8:11 p.m.

Respecfully sulbmitted,

Dayna McDermott-Arriola
Substitute Recording Clerk