

Town of Hampton
Board of Finance
Special Meeting
May 20, 2021
6:30 pm
Town Hall Lower Level

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m.

Roll Call: Members/Alternates Present: Kathy Donahue, Ed Adelman, Diane Gagnon, Jessie Samios, Nick Brown (7:15), Stan Crawford, Kathi Newcombe.

Others Present: First Selectman Allan Cahill, Selectman Bob Grindle, Treasurer Ellen Rodriguez, Hampton Elementary School Board of Education Chairman Rose Bisson and Vice-Chairman Mark Becker, Recording Secretary Dayna McDermott-Arriola.

Motion: Ed Adelman, seconded by Jessie Samios, to seat Kathi Newcombe for Judy Buell, as requested. Motion carried unanimously.

Citizen Comments: none.

Discussion and Possible Action on Proposed 2021-2022 Municipal Budget

The Municipal Budget was distributed, along with department requests and salary scales, and reviewed by board members. To Ed Adelman's question, First Selectman Cahill explained that the increase in Tax Collector Computer Support was due to the need to purchase new software, adding that he is pleased with the tax collection services. There was discussion regarding the Town Clerk Assistant's salary. Chairman Donahue reported that the salary increased by \$500 last year and \$3,500 this year. She advocated for transferring some money from the salary line to training for the Assistant. There was some discussion on the rate of pay, which Stan Crawford questioned for a new employee; Diane Gagnon also expressed concern over disparate compensation for employees at Town Hall, using as an example the Deputy Registrar of Voters, who has served for several years, received annual training and State certification, and earns less than the Town Clerk's Assistant who assumed the position last year with neither experience nor certification. Kathi Newcombe explained that evaluative tools and pay scales were supposed to be a subsequent step after the Board of Finance developed job descriptions for Town employees, yet that never occurred. Treasurer Rodriguez confirmed that there was a job description for the Assistant Town Clerk. Ed Adelman stated that he felt uncomfortable with the finance board's involvement in employee evaluations.

Motion: Kathi Newcombe, seconded by Jessie Samios, to transfer \$1,150 from the Town Clerk Assistant's Salary to Town Clerk Assistant's Professional Expense.

In Favor: Kathy Donahue, Nick Brown, Ed Adelman, Jessie Samios, Kathi Newcombe

Opposed: Diane Gagnon

Motion carried 5-1.

Ed Adelman asked if the Registrars of Voters anticipate additional expenses for absentee ballots if the Executive Order of the last election is extended. Treasurer Rodriguez responded that funds the Town received for Covid-related expenses would compensate for that cost. She also advised the board to split the compensation for the Clerk who serves both the Building Department and Planning & Zoning between those two departments.

Motion: Jessie Samios, seconded by Kathi Newcombe, to budget \$7,400 for Planning & Zoning Clerk. Motion carried unanimously.

Motion: Kathi Newcombe, seconded by Jessie Samios, to amend the motion to budget \$7,500 for Planning & Zoning Clerk and \$7,500 for Building Department Clerk; and to add \$500 to D.O.T. Physicals to correct a clerical error. Motion carried unanimously.

Stan Crawford noted that the Inland Wetlands Commission has only met once this year, though no adjustments were made to their budget request. Treasurer Rodriguez agreed to add a 2% cost of living increment for its Clerk under Board of Finance Administration to correct a clerical error. First Selectman Cahill explained that electricity and fuel for Town buildings increased by 5% in anticipation of their re-opening. Treasurer Rodriguez noted that an additional \$60 was added to Town Hall Cable to cover the actual cost, and suggested a \$1,300 increase to Community Center Supplies/Maintenance.

Motion: Kathi Newcombe, seconded by Diane Gagnon, to budget \$1,300 to Community Center Supplies/Maintenance. Motion carried unanimously.

First Selectman Cahill explained that the \$3000 increase in Town Garage & Generator Maintenance was due to the HVAC mechanical system. He also reported that the \$30,000 in Tree Removal was not spent this year, in the hopes that Eversource will remove the targeted trees, but would like the funding to remain to use as needed within the department. Chairman Donahue reported that Regional District #11's second proposal decreased by approximately \$16,000 by reducing the health insurance and substitute lines and the hours of the French teacher; but the Town's assessments have not been received. Treasurer Rodriguez suggested that the Social Security Town Share be reduced by \$3000 based on actuals to date.

Motion: Nick Brown, seconded by Kathi Newcombe, to reduce the Social Security Town Share to \$33,000. Motion carried unanimously.

Treasurer Rodriguez reported that approximately \$10,000 of the Contingency funds have been spent to date. Chairman Donahue reported that local businesses and personal donations should cover the costs of the Airline Trail Pamphlet. Ed Adelman questioned residents' use of NECCOG's Transit Services. Both Selectmen Cahill and Grindle confirmed that residents avail themselves of the service. Treasurer Rodriguez reported that there is \$40,134 currently in the Fire Department Capital & Non-recurring Account. There was some discussion on funding the Open Space and Land Acquisition accounts, but no changes were made to the Selectmen's recommendations. Treasurer Rodriguez suggested that income from Transfer Station Permits be reduced to reflect actual revenue.

Motion: Jessie Samios, seconded by Nick Brown, to reduce Transfer Station Permits to \$12,000. Motion carried unanimously.

Discussion and Possible Action on Proposed 2021-2022 Hampton Elementary School Budget

The elementary school's budget request was distributed along with the Department of Education's *2019-2020 Net Current Expenditures per Pupil*, *2019-2020 Minimum Budget Requirement*, the October 1, 2020 *Student Counts by School and Year*, the most recent enrollment chart from the school Principal's Report, a report on the bus arrival times and duration of runs, and options for cutting staff. Chairman Donahue reported that the Education Cost Sharing Grant is reduced next year by \$56,881 per a vote of the Appropriations Committee; the elementary school's portion of the reduction would be \$30,891. Scheduled reductions to the ECS grant will total \$470,000 by 2028. Due to the decline in student census, from 90 to 72, the Minimum Budget Requirement could be reduced by \$240,057 for a total possible reduction to the proposed budget of \$270,940. Though Chairman Donahue stated she could not consider such a drastic cut, spending needed to be reduced. Kathi Newcombe suggested reducing the proposed budget by half of that amount. Nick Brown voiced concern that the school sustained an unexpected \$130,000 increase in Special Education costs last year, and that the amount proposed would constitute a 6.3% decrease.

Possible reductions were addressed. The elimination of one of the three buses could save approximately \$55,000, according to school officials. Diane Gagnon reported on the number of students riding the buses during recent counts as follows: May 14 (AM): Bus A – 14, Bus B – 5, Bus C – 8; May 18 (PM): Bus A – 16, Bus B – 6, Bus C – 10; May 19 (AM): Bus A – 17, Bus B – 5, Bus C – 13; May 20 (PM) Bus A – 16, Bus B – 6, Bus C – 7. School board Vice-Chairman Mark Becker added that the school's start and end times would necessarily change if a bus was eliminated, as the buses would arrive late from Parish Hill

due to lengthened routes. Students arriving home after dark in winter months was also a concern. Suggestions included waivers for parents who transport their children to school, communal stops, and the use of a van to transport pre-school and kindergarten students. Chairman Donahue reported that this year, the Art and Physical Education teachers, currently at 2.5 and 4 days respectively, assisted in classrooms, and that limiting their assignments to the delivery of instruction in the fields of Art and Physical Education could result in savings of \$36,249, according to school officials. It was confirmed that each classroom has a certified teacher, a full-time paraprofessional, and receives special education services. Chairman Donahue also suggested that grant monies could cover educational expenses.

Motion: Kathi Newcombe, seconded by Diane Gagnon, to reduce the budget proposal by \$135,000.

In Favor: Kathi Newcombe, Diane Gagnon

Opposed: Kathy Donahue, Jessie Samios, Ed Adelman, Nick Brown

Motion failed: 2 – 4.

Kathi Newcombe noted that the school's per pupil cost of \$26,672.92 is the 8th highest in the state, while the town's wealth ranking is 122nd. Nick Brown clarified that the figure represents the district's per pupil spending. Chairman Donahue noted that the instructional staff to student ratio is 4:1 and that the school anticipates small classes in Pre-K and Kindergarten next year. Stan Crawford questioned the school's sustainability given the continued decline in enrollment. Chairman Donahue noted that a committee of officials from Hampton and Scotland has formed to address cooperative agreements, including the use of one facility to educate students from both towns.

Motion: Kathi Newcombe, seconded by Diane Gagnon, to reduce the budget by \$100,000, a 4.6% decrease.

In Favor: Jessie Samios, Diane Gagnon, Kathy Donahue, Kathi Newcombe

Opposed: Nick Brown, Ed Adelman.

Motion passes: 4-2

Discussion and Possible Action on Fire Department Length of Service Award Deficit and Funding

A spreadsheet developed by Kathi Newcombe titled *Fire Department Volunteer Incentive Program* containing information on the budgeted, actual, and recommended amounts, as well as administrative fees and benefit payments from 2006 to present was distributed. There were concerns raised regarding missing information, recording discrepancies, the history of the plan administrator, and a failure to deposit the town's contributions in a timely manner, resulting in a loss of interest. Everyone agreed that assistance from the board's attorney was needed in order to investigate these issues. Chairman Donahue also suggested increasing the term life insurance policy from \$10,000 to \$30,000 as a cost-saving measure and raising the entitlement age. By general consent the board affirmed the Selectmen's decision to double the amount in the Fire Department Volunteer Incentive line item for a total of \$50,000. The use of additional monies from the General Fund to reduce the deficit could be voted on separately. First Selectman Cahill noted that the Town is in a financial position to solve the problem, but it needs to be solved correctly. Nick Brown, Kathy Donahue and Kathi Newcombe volunteered to serve on a subcommittee to deal with outstanding issues.

Discuss 5-Year Plan: The 5-Year Plan was distributed and reviewed.

Set Date of Public Hearing: By general consent, the date for the Public Hearing was scheduled for June 1 at 7PM in the lower level of Town Hall.

Discuss Dates for Town Meeting & Referendum: The Town Meeting, officially set by the Board of Selectmen, is tentatively scheduled for June 15 to adjourn to referendum on June 22, noon to 8PM.

Citizen Comments: none.

Adjournment: There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9PM p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Dayna McDermott Arriola
Recording Clerk

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