

Hampton Board of Finance
Special Meeting
Tuesday, September 24, 2013
7pm
Hampton Town Hall

Meeting Minutes

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 7:03pm by Chair Rheo Brouillard.

Members present: Rheo Brouillard, Stan Crawford, Penny Newbury, Paul Wakely, Margaret Haraghey, Luciann Norton.

Alternates present: Jeff Clermont.

Members/alternates absent: Dan Meade.

Others present: Several members of the Board of Education, Selectman Bob Grindle, Treasurer Ellen Rodriguez, and several citizens.

Citizen Comments: Board of Finance (BoF) Chair Rheo Brouillard announced that he would allow citizens comments until 7:15pm, in order to allow the Board to commence with the business of the meeting.

Lynn Burdick suggested that the Superintendent position could be reduced, based upon past experience when Hampton shared a Superintendent with Chaplin, Scotland, and Parish Hill; she also noted that guidelines say that a class of less than 15 students does not require a paraprofessional except for one-on-one situations mandated per an IEP.

Mark Becker said that the Board of Education (BoE) has a statute they must follow in crafting a budget adequate for the students; he said that the Board members have a hundred years of education experience and are doing their due diligence.

Phoebe Huang wants to the BoE to explain why the school has such a low staff/student ratio when nationwide it's 16:1. The average class size per the SDE is twenty. Why do we want a lower figure across the board?

BoF Chair Rheo summarized an email from Arlene Becker who supports a higher budget amount for the elementary school.

BoE Chair John Burnham distributed a budget document showing a bottom line \$43,509 below a flat-funded. The BoE has not met to talk about any further reductions, will discuss at their meeting on 9/25. He presented information about some unanticipated expenses in this fiscal year, such as \$5,000 additional special ed costs, the loss of \$19,000 of the School Readiness grant due to lower enrollment, a pump replacement of \$9,000 (possibly could be funded by Capital/Non-recurring fund), some kitchen expenses, and some smaller items. The BoE recommends submitting this budget to the town, considering that with \$20,000 of leftover funds from the previous fiscal year (currently directed to the Capital/Non-recurring fund), it would leave about \$60,000 of the balance to be funded by additional taxes or reserves. The BoE Finance Committee met and decided it will look at staffing levels if directed by the BoF to reduce the budget. HES is above the state average for hours of specials within state recommendations. They will also consider reading and math support position reductions. There could potentially be unemployment compensation costs and there could be bumping of less experienced staff per the certified staff contract. BoE Chair Burnham said that HES has average class sizes below state and national averages, but there is only one class per grade. Reading & math support, special education,

occupational therapy, physical therapy, speech & language services are all driven by IEP. Administration costs have been mentioned; the system did not function well under the RD11 Superintendent. There are many new initiatives – Common Core, new teacher evaluation system mandated by the state. The average principal salary in CT is \$125,000 compared to Hampton's \$96,900, which also includes special education director duties previously contracted out at around \$10,000 per year. The average Superintendent salary in CT is \$139,900 vs Hampton's \$67,500 for a half-time superintendent. The Board of Ed has been trying to work with other region boards to look at increased efficiencies in the business office which also once was part of the central office. The business coordinator position had been increased to 32 hours from 28, now reduced to 30 hours; if cut further less work would get done. Penny asked for clarification of some of the figures presented which BoE Chair Burnham then provided. BoF Chair Rheo Brouillard thought the \$20,000 in unexpended 2012-13 funds should go to the Capital/Non-Recurring Fund for the school rather than the general fund to help provide for the long term needs of the school.

Discuss and act on 2013-14 Budget: Chair Rheo reviewed previous discussions on the budget, stating that there were strong opinions on both sides. The Board of Finance faces a dilemma in trying to interpret the three votes. The BoE believes the last vote with 80 additional voters was a strong indication that voters wanted the budget reduction to be less. On the other hand, there were more additional yes votes than additional no votes, and the difference between yes and no was 27 votes; the Board of Finance doesn't really know whether the no votes meant cut more or cut less. Adding advisory ballot questions with whatever budget bottom line is decided upon will help determine the will of the voters. It was the Board of Finance's interpretation of the voters rejecting a .5 mil increase budget to mean voters want no tax increase. The Board made the decision to return a zero tax increase budget, it wasn't about the school. The Board needs to decide if it is staying with the same budget just defeated or lowering the \$83,000 cut.

Margaret moved and Penny seconded that the budget be left at the same amount, \$2,132,079, and insist that the BoE provide a budget showing where the cuts will be so people can see where they are going to be made before they vote on it, and add questions to the ballot.

Discussion ensued.

BoF Chair Rheo was concerned that the voters have the information needed from the BoE – is there time to do that; BoE Chair Burnham said that it was very probable that the BoE would produce a budget that showed the cuts, since that Board was criticized for not doing so before, but it may be a budget that the BoE cannot endorse.

Margaret asked why the BoE is not considering cutting raises.

Penny says we're facing cuts that people may not like, that the cuts may come in areas that they would not choose to have.

Luci asked how truthful a budget would be if the BoE would not endorse it – would the BoE vote to make some cuts, then if the budget passes, change where the cuts are made – it's a hot button topic in town; BoE Chair Burnham responded that would not happen.

BoF Chair Rheo suggested some possible questions to add to ballot. It's possible that the town may need a supplemental tax bill be sent in January. The BoF has crafted a letter to send to every household, vetted through the entire BoF so that it contains just information. Fiscal responsibility requires consideration of the potential impact of the budget. If revaluation lowers the tax base and increases the tax rate, that can have a negative impact on taxpayers. In addition, the town may not get as much revenue from the state, which is in economic turmoil, which will also negatively impact future budgets. BoE Chair Burnham talked about raises, they do add up to only a few thousand dollars; in addition, with reval everything evens out.

Luci pointed out a high tax rate can affect whether or not people move into town.

Penny said town raises were also not significant but contributed to what had to be cut.

Penny suggested that the motion be amended to leave off the mandate to the BoE to present a line item budget with cuts, and meet with the BoE after the budget is voted on to determine together what should be cut.

BoE Chair Burnham suggested the BoF direct the BoE to come up with a certain amount of cuts then present to BoF at a future meeting.

BoF Chair Rheo wants to put number on table with questions so the BoF knows what the voters want.

Margaret amended the motion to leave off the insistence that the BoE provide a line item budget with the cuts, Penny seconded; the vote was taken with Rheo, Margaret, Penny, Luci and Paul, voting yes and Stan voting no; motion passed.

Discussion of the wording of questions on ballot:

1. Shall the Town of Hampton appropriate \$2,132,079 for the Hampton Elementary School for the 2013-2014 fiscal year? (yes or no)
2. Do you believe an \$83,000 cut to the elementary school budget is too much or not enough? (too much or not enough)
3. Do you support up to a .5 mil increase in taxes to fund the HES budget? (yes or no)

BoE Chair Burnham wondered if a question should be added to support transfer from the general fund.

BoF Chair Rheo thought that a transfer was within the purview of the Board; if the voters reject a tax increase but want the BoE budget increased, the difference will have to come from the general fund.

Dayna Arriola suggested we should also ask if we support reducing the MBR since that's the reason for the cuts in the first place.

Lynn Burdick suggested the wording of "too much" or "not enough" would be enough; no more questions need be asked.

Authorize expenditure for letter to town residents: After receiving cost information on sending a letter to every household in town, **Stan moved and Penny seconded to authorize up to \$400 to send a mailing to every household in town via the USPS Every Door Direct Mail; motion passed unanimously.**

Adjourn: Meeting was adjourned at 7:52pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathi Newcombe,

Board of Finance Recording Clerk