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**TOWN OF STONINGTON  
BOARD OF FINANCE SPECIAL MEETING  
PUBLIC HEARING  
Stonington High School Auditorium  
Tuesday, March 26th, 2024  
7:00 PM**

A meeting of the Board of Finance was held on this date (3/26/2024) at the Stonington High School Auditorium. Members present were Chairman O'Brien, Mr. Fauerbach, Ms. Norman, Ms. Young, Mr. Sternberg, Mr. Brown, and Mr. Johnson.

Chairman O'Brien called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

The pledge of allegiance was recited.

Chairman O'Brien thanked Stonington First Selectman Danielle Chesebrough for all her work towards finalizing this year's budget. The Chairman also thanked all outside agencies, Department Heads, and town employees that contributed to this process.

Chairman O'Brien briefly discussed an email account that was set up in an effort to receive feedback from the general public.

First Selectman Danielle Chesebrough briefly emphasized the Chairman's comments and expressed appreciation for all the work that was done to reach this point. Jim Sullivan was thanked for his hard work.

**Public Comments:**

Selectman Budget:

Chief Joseph Burdick, 86 Barnes Road, Wequetequock Fire Department, spoke against cutting Line 136 (Fire Department Dispatch). Chief Burdick expressed that these are funds that the Department was expecting to receive and a budget has already been determined and posted. Removing these funds would prevent them from purchasing 'life saving equipment' and from performing all necessary tasks.

Jessica Morrissey, 46 Broad St, discussed being a property owner here in Stonington since 1983 and is in support of the Stonington Borough Fire Department. Ms. Morrissey does not approve of the budget cuts to the Fire Department (Line 136) and would like to know why these funds were removed from the budget.

Michael Schefers, 188 Water St, Stonington Borough Warden, spoke against cutting Line 136. Mr. Schefers read a brief letter which was submitted to the Westerly Fire Department. Mr. Schefers understood that these funds would not be removed.

Human Resource Comments:

Kevin Bowdler, 44 Gold St, Stonington Free Library Board President, spoke in support of the 5% fund increase for the Stonington Free Library. Mr. Bowdler discussed that costs have gone up and 70% of their funds are raised by themselves. They are continuing to grow their services and have not asked for an increase in three years.

Julie Quinn, 22 Diving St, Member of Stonington Free Library Board of Trustees, spoke about the services that the Stonington Free Library provides to the elderly community including reading groups and book delivery. They help improve the living conditions of the elderly through a number of programs.

Jean Fiore, 2 Cannon Square, spoke in support of the Stonington Free Library budget. Ms. Fiore discussed the communal benefits and the services that are offered by the library.

Nick Kepple, 224 North Main St, spoke about his ties to the library community in Stonington and supports the 5% increase for each library line item. Mr. Kepple commented on other towns that spend much more on their libraries and also spoke in support of committing funds to improving biking infrastructure within Stonington.

David Snediker, 11 Washington St, spoke in support of the 5% increase for each library line item as they are a vital part of the community.

Peggy Brissette, 192 Farmholme Rd, spoke as a volunteer and in support of the Mystic Noank library. Ms. Brissette feels that all libraries are important as they provide services for the rich, poor, children, etc.

Board of Education:

Jaicee Getchell, 11 Moss St, read a letter from state representative Greg Howard which commented on the importance of paraeducators towards guidance, mentorship, and success of students. Ms. Getchell spoke as a paraeducator in Stonington and a single mother who does not believe the wages are high enough to keep her family in Stonington.

Ashley Tewell, 113 Whittaker Dr. expressed support for the Board of Education budget and the fact that many parents move here specifically for the school system. Paraeducator salaries need to be competitive to maintain the staff in place and Ms. Tewell asks that Stonington look at housing developments and the tax breaks that they are receiving or will receive.

Kate Teixeira, 5 Marjorie St. spoke as a paraeducator at DMS and is in support of having competitive salaries. Ms. Teixeira discussed the number of impactful moments that paraeducators experience with students that are often not seen by the general public.

Elizabeth Young, 8 Red Oak La. spoke in support of the Stonington Public Schools and their paraeducators. Ms. Young has a daughter in the school system and would like to see an agreement reached.

Michelle Pease, 7 Surrey La. spoke as a paraeducator at DMW and read a letter that was written by Laura Dow. The Chairman clarified that this letter was directed to the Board of Education. The commitment of Stonington paraeducators and their contribution to the Stonington school system were mentioned.

Nick Kepple, 224 North Main St, thanked the Board of Finance for their commitment to helping to provide quality services within Stonington. Mr. Kepple also discussed the positive economic impact of having a strong school system, the direct effect that paraeducators have on that school system, and lastly compared Stonington's mill rate to other towns to indicate that Stonington can afford supporting the schools as there is currently a low relative mill rate.

Alison Rogers, 15 William St. spoke in support of the paraeducators as they are teaching and supporting the future of Stonington's students.

John Denard, 44 Riverside Dr, has been a special education teacher in town for 32 years. Mr. Denard discussed having a special needs child that benefited greatly from being assigned a paraeducator while in school. Mr. Denard expressed that he would have accepted a much higher mill rate to support these educators and is asking the Board to put the district and their families first.

Laura Mathewson, 25 Fellows St. shared her experiences as a paraeducator including mediating issues with students, making them feel comfortable, fostering social skills, etc. The paraeducators create joy for the students they assist and help further their education.

Glenn Frishman, 1219 Pequot Tr. spoke in favor of reducing the budget.

Cate Statchen, 57 Briar Patch Rd, President of Student Government and Student Government Representative for the Board of Education, read numerous accounts from students recounting their positive experiences with paraeducators in Stonington. Ms. Statchen commented that highly beneficial services will be taken away if the budget is cut and urged the Board members to support her education and the educators.

Cindy Nadeau, 21 Cronin Ave, spoke in favor of the Board of Education budget and would support a further increase. Ms. Nadeau discussed having three special education children and their experiences with the paraeducators.

Connie Tassias, 37 Trumbull St, spoke in support of paraeducators and believed that they should be paid more. Ms. Tassias discussed the income that they receive before and after taxes relative to surrounding areas where they are paid more, the help that her daughter received in increasing her socialization, and that paraeducators choose to work this job when they can be paid more elsewhere.

Barry Mapen, 324 Elm St, mentioned moving to Stonington because of the school system. It is an advertisement for the town and would like to see their budget restored as much as possible to maintain their quality staff.

Ashley Huesman, 49 Dawley Dr, spoke as a paraeducator at DMS. Ms. Huesman referenced a letter that she read for the Board of Education and discussed being a single mother with two children who may have to move out of Stonington due to their low wages.

Farouk Rajab, 41 Somerset Dr, Chair of Board of Education, discussed the restrictions that a limited budget creates and that many residents move to Stonington because of the school system. Mr. Rajab commented on the research that went into determining their budget and asked that it be approved to benefit the children of Stonington.

Dan Kelley, 23 Renee Dr, spoke in support of the paraeducators, commented on the importance of the education system, and read a letter from one of Stonington's paraeducators. Mr. Kelley commented on the idea of losing staff to neighboring towns that pay higher wages and the budgeting for positions that go unfilled.

Alison Schlink, 28 Green Ave, spoke as a paraeducator in Stonington for 24 years. Ms. Schlink commented on her appreciation for the job but that there is opportunity for higher paying positions elsewhere.

#### Capital Improvements:

Richard Newton, 32 Meadowbrook Lane, Chair of Climate Change Task Force, discussed the necessity of the Town to pay attention to climate related issues. Mr. Newton discussed the POCD plans related to climate change and suggested further means for protection of vulnerable areas such as open space.

Julia Parry, 36 Money Pt Road, expressed that climate change affects everyone and believes the Board should consider expenditures related to climate change and infrastructure.

Ashley Tewell, 113 Whittaker Dr, understood that taxes tend to increase and therefore would not like to see any funds leaving the education budget.

With no further comments, the Chairman adjourned the public hearing at 8:44 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

James Sullivan, Director of Finance