

HAMPTON VA

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release

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Citizen budget input: March 8, 2016

Brian Deprofio made a presentation with information about the budget:

<http://hampton.gov/DocumentCenter/View/10295>

Comments/questions:

Robie Tuck:

Thank you for this briefing. It was very thorough. I like your initiative of the online chat for those who can't come out.

J. Harris: Can I get some more information on unfunded mandates? More detail. What is the state requiring?

Mary Bunting:

Line of Duty was something that benefits our public safety professionals who get injured on the job. It's good and worthwhile, but it's something the state set up. When they couldn't balance the state budget during the recession, they told localities they had to pay for it themselves.

Disabled veterans tax relief – costs Hampton more than \$1 million per year. It may cost other localities less than \$5,000. We have worked with our state legislators to seek state funding or relief, but they have not been able to get traction with a majority of the General Assembly. Again, it's worthwhile, but it was approved statewide and it's not being funded statewide.

Stormwater mandates were set by EPA and administered by the state Department of Environmental Quality. Basically the idea is to help ensure that we get cleaner waterways. For us, the focus is on the Chesapeake Bay. It's all noble goals – to eliminate pollutants. Here, sediment, nitrogen and phosphorus are the concerns. They create algae blooms and limit the sunlight. EPA set models that would reduce those chemicals and we have to make progress. We also do measurements to check. They are all good things – but we didn't make the decision or the timetable. There is no local decision-making. And they keep raising the ante, moving the bar higher.

J. Harris: Do they tell you what stormwater projects to do, or can you decide?

Mary Bunting: Some of each. They absolutely require monitoring and measurement. They also decide how much credit you get for each project. We do negotiate to see how much credit we can get for each project and use that information to decide which projects to do when.

Robie Tuck: Where can I see the capital budget?

Mary Bunting: It will be introduced at Planning Commission later this month and Council next month. The survey is closed now, but the results should be online. We'll get you those results.

[\[http://hampton.gov/ivalue\]](http://hampton.gov/ivalue)

Michael McHenry: Thank you – this was very informative. I understand that you can't do a lot of things if you don't have the dollars to do it. The view from down here in the community is that we're seeing people leave. When you see a moving van, I ask why are they moving. It's because of schools and crime. In Wythe, it's now routine – somebody posts on there that I just heard shots again. That and the accreditation of schools are big-time problems. I didn't come here to complain; I want to contribute and improve this community.

Mary Bunting: I assure you those concerns and issues are not missed.

Michael McHenry: The employees you've got deserve a pay raise. They're superlative. I decided to retire here. I didn't even realize what a jewel it was. I enjoy working with your employees – and that includes the police. The neighborhood office – when that was cut back so drastically, it really cut the umbilical cord between city hall and the community. In Olde Wythe, we feel like we're just out there flailing.

We love retiring here. But I can't get new employees to live here. What they tell me is that the challenges with the schools and with crime are reasons that they choose to go somewhere else.

Mary Bunting: My children are in Hampton City Schools, and I believe they are getting a better education than I did. People may think I say that because I'm city manager, but at the end of the day, you do what's best for your child. We've got to encourage people to dig deeper into that data and we need to help them. The school system is implementing career academies that help give students a pathway to their career. In medicine, that can be a technician or a doctor – all ranges. I think the career academies are a major transformation. I think we have a much stronger system than people commonly believe. And we have to crack that nut so more people hear that and know that. Crime: There has been an uptick in our region. We find that criminals are more aggressive and that generally police officers are generally a little less aggressive. It makes for a dangerous mix. I hope you saw the editorial that the mayor and vice mayor wrote. [Read it here: <http://hampton.gov/DocumentCenter/View/10294>] Our police officers are men and women who risk their lives for us and they need to know they have our support and they need to be appropriately aggressive, and the community needs to know we will deal with any inappropriate actions.

We have done more community proactive work – making sure that police officers are in the neighborhood more frequently and making sure neighbors know they are wanted to help give officers more tips, more eyes and ears. Chief Sult has redirected a lot of his officers' time. Also forming relationships with young people so they see police as protectors and guardians. We are also doing more surveillance activities. We also believe that with body cameras, it's going to be a very effective deterrent. The more we can support our officers as a community, the more we're going to see some of these problems solved.

Olde Wythe is split into two areas for crime reports; one area is going down in crime and one is going up. We are working at the core issues with undercover operations and patrols. We also have a federal prosecutor on our staff to try cases in federal court, where we get more expeditious trials and generally stronger penalties.

We will start to add back to our Neighborhood office over time. At least, I will recommend that. I don't know if Council will agree. We cut back during the recession – people said they were OK with that cut – but we hope to add people back over time. I expect to have another position in the budget this coming year. I wish I could add more, but I think we can add resources gradually over time. We've learned that the one set of cuts we did that really hurt us was the neighborhood services.

Robie Tuck: The Next Door initiative is a great idea – it has helped fill in some of those gaps. Also, the “Coffee with a Cop” program; it helps with neighborhoods connecting. Getting the communication helps us from being in the dark.

Mary Bunting: Chief Sult has been aggressive at communications and data. I’m glad you see the benefits.

I was very encouraged recently that the ministers of Hampton and Newport News have formed a group called the Unity Project. Last week, Hampton High School was filled with people saying they want to be part of the solution, saying they are willing to be a mentor or form a Neighborhood Watch. It's not just a government solution – the ministers are saying we have to work outside our church and get involved in the community. One of the great things about Hampton is we have people willing to roll up their sleeves and get involved.

J. Harris: I agree that the employees deserve a raise. How much on the tax rate would it cost to give them 3%?

Mary Bunting: I’m not going to raise real estate taxes to finance employee raises. We have some revenue growth. Each 1% increase is roughly equal to \$1 million. If I had to do 3% with a tax increase, it would be 3 cents. But I’m not going to raise the real estate tax this year.

The teachers need it too. Many of our employees went about 5 years without a pay increase. We think they need a raise.

Mary Bunting: Please tell people who couldn’t come out here tonight that there are two more opportunities for chats. They will be online chats, at <http://www.hampton.gov/chat>. One is Monday, May 14 at 7 p.m. The other is Tuesday, May 15 at noon. People can ask me questions, and I’ll answer them just like tonight – except they don’t have to be there in person.

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