

Select Board Statement — Budget Working Group

Mr. Romano,

Thank you for placing this important letter on tonight's agenda, signed by our respected School Superintendent, Police Chief, Fire Chief, and BPW Superintendent regarding the Budget Working Group.

I am privileged to have been elected by the voters of Fairhaven to serve on this Select Board. At one of our very first meetings, I introduced the Budget Working Group because I made a promise to the people of this town: to bring accountability, fresh ideas, and a new approach to addressing our financial challenges. I knew then, as I know now, that change is never easy—but **my promise then and now is to protect the hardworking Taxpayers, and employees of Fairhaven, our police officers, firefighters, teachers, and laborers, who did not create the financial problems we face today.** These problems developed over years of decisions made by town leadership, administrators, and department management. Yet time and time again, it is the taxpayers and workers and their families who suffer the consequences

Because my name and recommendations were specifically referenced, I believe I owe this board, the Town Administrator, our volunteers, and most importantly, the taxpayers of Fairhaven a response.

Recently, during a Budget Working Group meeting, I was asked a simple question: **“Who do you represent?”**

My answer is simple. I represent the people of Fairhaven.

I represent taxpayers who deserve a town government that operates efficiently, responsibly, and within its means.

Those are the people I represent, and I will not apologize for asking difficult questions on their behalf to town leadership.

Let me be equally clear: I respect our department heads and the essential services they provide. Their experience matters, and disagreement is a healthy part of government.

But what concerns me is that four department leaders, with more than 50 years of combined experience, have collectively criticized the efforts of citizen volunteers who are giving their time and expertise without compensation because they care about Fairhaven.

Our volunteers deserve cooperation, not discouragement. We should be building bridges between our departments and our citizens, not walls.

The Budget Working Group was never created to dictate how departments operate or diminish the importance of education, public safety, or public works. Its mission is to explore reasonable opportunities to make our government more efficient, effective, and financially sustainable.

That means examining regionalization, consolidation, outsourcing, privatization, staffing structures, municipal operations, town-owned properties, and opportunities to grow our tax base. It also means advocating for increased Chapter 70 funding and unrestricted state aid.

These are questions for investigation, not predetermined conclusions. That is responsible government—not an attack on our departments.

The financial projections presented to us indicate potential structural deficits of approximately \$2 million to more than \$4 million in the coming years. We cannot ignore these numbers and hope they disappear.

I respect that some members of this Select Board believe a Proposition 2½ override may be necessary. I disagree that asking taxpayers for more money should be our first response when we have not exhausted every reasonable opportunity to control costs, improve efficiency, and increase revenue.

Our residents have already rejected overrides. We must take that decision seriously.

I am not suggesting every proposal will work, that every service should change, or that private contractors will always be less expensive. I am saying something much simpler:

We have a duty to find out before telling our taxpayers there is no alternative but to increase your taxes!

If privatization will not save money, show us the numbers. If regionalization is impractical, explain why. If our existing operations are already the most efficient, demonstrate that with facts.

I welcome that evidence. I welcome the expertise of our department heads. And if they have better ideas to address our projected deficits without placing additional burdens on taxpayers, I will gladly support serious consideration of those ideas.

Leadership is not defending the way things have always been done. Leadership is having the wisdom to determine whether there is a better way.

To the members of the Budget Working Group: please know that your service matters. You volunteered because you care about Fairhaven and want to help find solutions. I

am sincerely grateful for your time, your dedication, and your willingness to take on this difficult challenge. Please do not be discouraged from doing the work this board and taxpayers asked you to do. With collaboration between Mr. Mark Rees and Mr. Dan Lopes, the BWG unanimously voted on a mythology as to how they would communicate and work professionally with Town leadership. Let them do their job

We must remember that we are all on the same team. **The team is Fairhaven, and the people we ultimately answer to are our taxpayers.**

Our obligation is not to protect the status quo. Our obligation is to protect Fairhaven's future.

Thank you.