



Anthony Calabrese While I'm all for keeping our taxes affordable, I believe the way your group is pursuing this is detrimental to our town. It's proven time and again, good schools equal higher property values. Good schools make our town desirable to live in and do business in. What doesn't help our town are scare tactics and trying to divide the COMMUNITY. There is no reason to pit any one group against another. We are all in favor of good schools and reasonable taxes, lets all work together to achieve these goals.

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Anthony, Thanks for your comments.

First, you were not specific with regard to how you believe that our efforts are detrimental to our town, so we can only respond in general that “the way” we are pursuing the objective of keeping Fairfield affordable for all of its residents is to identify what we believe to be the most important issues, and then to provide arguments and information about them that help everyone understand them. As we have said many times, we agree that “good schools make our Town desirable to live in and do business in,” but we also believe that it is possible to have too much of good thing if our spending on any public service increases our taxes to a level that is not affordable. I suspect you agree that there must be limits to how much we can tax and spend without becoming unaffordable, but we may disagree on what the affordable level of spending and taxes may be. Helping everyone address that simple question and then to seek broad agreement on the best answer is central to what Fairfield Taxpayer is doing. After an extended period of prosperity, when rising incomes and home values made spending and taxing decisions easier than they are now in a much more difficult economic environment, we believe that it is essential to focus on the long-term consequences of the decisions we have made and will make about our annual spending and taxes.

Second, we also agree, unequivocally, that “what doesn’t help are scare tactics and trying to divide the community,” and that “there is no reason to pit any one group against another.” As far as we know, Fairfield Taxpayer has done nothing that even remotely qualifies as either “scare tactics” or “group warfare” or “personal attacks.” In contrast, advocates for school spending have made the following claims:

“Urgent Education Budget Update: The First Selectman cut \$800,000 from next year's education budget request. The local taxpayer group is now calling for an additional \$4 million cut. To reach this large number, the Board of Education would have to consider devastating measures, including:

- Massive Layoffs of Certified Teachers and Other Staff
- Increased Class Sizes
- Further Reductions to Elementary World Language
- Eliminate Certain High School Electives
- Increase Fees for Sports and Extra-Curricular Activities (Pay-to-Play)
- Reduce Music Programs
- Cancel Critical Maintenance Projects
- Cut Technology Purchases Required for Curriculum And SBAC Testing”

For the record, Fairfield Taxpayer has said only that “any increase in our taxes should be no greater than 1.5% (the current rate of inflation), which would require a \$4 million reduction in the currently proposed \$8 million increase for the Town’s total budget,” and “since the BOE budget is more than half of the total, it is simply not possible to restrain our overall spending without continuing to restrain the cost of our schools.” If someone wants to propose a reasonable and acceptable way to hold our overall tax increase to 1.5% without any reduction in the BOE’s proposed \$5.8 million increase in spending, Fairfield Taxpayer would be happy to consider whether that would be good for the Town.

As for pitting one group against another, or making personal attacks, Fairfield Taxpayer has done neither. Our focus is always on identifying and addressing the issues in a thoughtful and civil manner. In contrast, consider the following sample of the now hundreds of similar comments posted on the Internet from advocates for school spending.

- “Some of you may be aware of a group called the Fairfield Taxpayer, some of you may even be fans. Although their stated mission is “to preserve Fairfield as both a desirable and affordable community for all its residents,” this is not really accurate. You see, Fairfield Taxpayer is really John Levinson & Bud Morten, two of Fairfield’s wealthiest residents. Why is it necessary to know this you might say? Well, I think it’s important to understand the irony of these men, who have so much, telling us as Fairfield parents, that we have “champagne tastes.” Mr. Levinson and Mr. Morten have used their considerable resources to put together a slick website and Facebook page where they broadcast their opinions. Unfortunately, they frequently distort facts, cherry pick data that fits their paradigm and make outrageous statements about our schools. When people post and respond with facts that contradict their claims, those posts are deleted. I speak from experience. Ultimately, their concern is not for affordability for all, but rather pure self-interest. You see, while low-quality schools will not likely affect the value of a home on Sasco Hill or Harbor Rd, it will most definitely affect the value of the average Fairfield home. Trust me, seeing what has happened with the budget in recent years has certainly given me pause. Through deceptive tactics, Ffld Taxpayer has managed to encourage many citizens to angrily demand cuts in the education budget. But let me be clear - the ed budget has hardly “budgeted” in the last 6 years and enrollment continues to increase. That’s why costs are going up, more kids + inflation. Fairfield actually puts forth 5 million in senior tax relief to help our older residents stay in their homes, and yet the quality of our children’s education gets squeezed year after year. This is not political - our BOE is made up of Republicans and Democrats who looked at the budget presented by Dr. Title, and not only found it to be lean, they actually added money in hopes of restoring some essential programs that have been cut in recent years. Our schools need our help - class sizes continue to grow, more cuts are looming and we must try to stem the tide. Please join me in supporting our education budget. I would hate for two self-serving individuals to damage the quality of life in this lovely town that I have been proud to call home.”
- “So basically Fairfield Taxpayer is like a local Super PAC and these guys are the Koch Brothers who are funding it. We should all feel played.”
- “They are a pathetic group of people. Talk about selfish.”
- “Try cutting the Pequot Library funding....watch how fast they move to oppose that. BTW, I’m not saying I support cutting that, I was just using it as an example lol”
- “I think they are doing this to gain publicity for the future. Pathetic.”
- “It has been revealed FTA is run by 2 wealthy men who probably sent their kids to private school. They are only worried about their personal tax bills. They live on Sasco Beach and are immune to housing prices tumbling if our schools are downgraded. Shameful.”
- “This town is losing its way and character since FTA bullied its way into political process.”
- “The worst is they wear sheep’s clothes pretending to rep the needs of seniors. Shameful.”
- “Last year at the budget hearing I said that I didn’t want to hear about affordability issues from someone with a Harbor Road address. Of course I got hisses and was even warned by the BOF chair. But that is what is happening. The people you mentioned are wealthy individuals who have the means to pay their share, they just decided to attack our kids instead.”
- “I knew [xxx] when his daughter was at Choate. I have a hard time believing that his website is for anything other than his own self interest and keeping his own tax bill down.”
- “But it is an us vs. them issue. They are affluent men who are taking away from MY KIDS education so they can save a few bucks on their tax bill. They are bringing the fight. I feel for seniors in town who are of limited means and get squeeze by higher costs of living. These guys are not among them.”
- “I felt it was relevant as it is public knowledge and that divorces can often have a negative financial influence on one’s income Which would be directly relevant to this discussion. No mud slinging, just the facts.”

In conclusion, we encourage you to advocate strongly everywhere for a thoughtful and informed discussion of the important issues we face as a community.

