

Exhibit A

Testimony Before Lake Park, FL Town Commission 9/02/2026

Public Comment on the '26-27 Town Budget re: Across the Board Merit Raises for All Staff

Michael Steinhauer, 435 Greenbriar Dr. pipestone1992@gmail.com 608-332-5547

Private Resident / Lake Park Society for the Advancement of Civic Engagement

Good evening.

I will begin by expressing my appreciation with the budget presentation to residents on August 22nd. Richard's team has done a remarkable job reworking the budget proposal document for its ease of readability and understanding. The dialogue was especially welcome as it rarely happens here. Thank you.

I also note that budget workshops here have clearly demonstrated your collective concern about the impact on residents. Thank you.

I want to raise concern about the proposed budget provision that would provide all town employees with a 3% merit increase on top of a 2.5% COLA.

I absolutely support paying our employees fairly and recognizing good performance. Our staff members are important to the effective operation of this town, and we want to retain good people.

But I question whether **this is the right year for an across-the-board 3% merit increase**. That increase in compensation opens the door to all the additional costs that accompany higher salaries.

These "merit" increase **BELIES** the very intent and definition of what a merit is, when you give it to everybody. The very purpose of merit recognition becomes diluted and meaningless.

Amendment 3 is anticipated to pass. It could substantially reduce the taxable value available to municipalities. I believe a prudent local government should be cautious about creating permanent recurring expenses in light of the unknown.

The COLA already recognizes inflation and helps our employees maintain their purchasing power.

An employee's palatability to accept this idea is predicated on 4 considerations:

- a) Whether staff feel like their presence and work product makes a difference;
- b) Whether staff feel respected for the work they do, from the Commission to the Town Manager to the residents;
- c) Whether staff feel like their work environment is generally positive, safe, and happy;
- d) And whether the town shows its appreciation by spontaneous acts of support, like the extra days off for holidays.

Small town culture speaks to caring for each other. And I believe staff will understand and accept that the merit portion of the budget will require sacrifice. This isn't about being anti-employee. **It is about being pro long-term financial stability. Your courage in this decision will go a long way to addressing most of the other cost center challenges you currently face. Please think deeply about this.** Thank you.