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POLITICAL SCENE



Little Compton Town Hall, on the north side of the Town Commons. GLENN OSMUNDSON/THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL, FILE

How tiny Little Compton got into big financial mess

Antonia Noori Farzan
Providence Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

For many years, Little Compton’s finances seemed as neat and orderly as the white clapboard buildings that line the quaint Town Commons.

Taxes were low. The budget was small. Republicans dominated the Town Council and Budget Committee, and townspeople dutifully showed up at the Financial Town Meeting each year to vote on how much to spend on street lights and senior meal programs.

But in the spring of 2025, that picturesque vision of small-town government faded away.

Town officials revealed in May that Little Compton was facing a \$1 million budget deficit and would need to slash spending while increasing the tax levy

by 12% – triple what’s typically allowed under state law.

Unbeknownst to many residents, Little Compton had been relying on surplus cash from the general fund to balance its budget year after year, with little to no public oversight. Its books were in disarray. And it soon became clear that the town’s problems had been quietly mounting for years, said **Andrew Rhyne**, a member of the Little Compton Budget Committee.

“These kinds of issues do not occur overnight,” he said.

Town kept taxes down by drawing millions from general fund

Little Compton has the lowest residential property tax rate in Rhode Island. Compared with other wealthy coastal communities, it’s a bargain: Last

year, the typical tax bill for a \$3 million summer home was a little over \$15,000. Compare that with the roughly \$21,000 paid in Jamestown, or nearly \$25,000 paid in Newport.

For many years, Republicans’ message to voters was, “We keep your property taxes low, and we run a tight ship,” said Rhyne, a Democrat. And for a while, that appeared to be true, he added. But it’s now clear that the town kept taxes artificially low by drawing down its reserves.

In both fiscal year 2024 and 2025, Little Compton used more than \$1 million from the general fund to balance its budget, “which is never a good idea,” said Rhode Island Auditor General **David Bergantino**. That created a structural deficit and reduced the

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Could cuts come to Newport birthing center?

Savana Dunning
Newport Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK

Amid local concerns that cuts will be made to Newport Hospital’s birthing center, the Newport City Council has scheduled a special meeting for July 15 to discuss a resolution advocating for the center’s “full operation.”

When asked about the concerns that the birthing center could face cuts, a Newport Hospital spokesperson said a decision has yet to be made.

“We are still finalizing Brown Health’s FY2026 budget, and final determinations have not been made yet,” a Newport Hospital spokesperson said. “Our priority remains protecting our core mission, and we expect to provide more details in the coming weeks.”

The resolution sponsored by Councilors Xay Khamsyvoravong and Jeanne Marie Napolitano follows correspondence from concerned constituents who heard of the possibility of the birthing center being cut during an internal meeting. However, concerns presented themselves earlier, during the state budget process, Khamsyvoravong said. The resolution is the only topic to be discussed at the July 15 meeting, which will be held at 7 p.m. in council chambers.

“Brown Health has been very vocal throughout the state budget process, and more recently, that that strain could result in cuts to services that are provided at the local level, specifically the Birthing Center, which is the labor and delivery unit of Newport hospitals, one that was mentioned during the state budget cycle, and that continues to be under review for potential elimination by Brown Health and that’s very concerning for us,” Khamsyvoravong said. “That’s an absolutely pivotal part of our healthcare network,

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Recovery effort on pause amid new flooding fears

John Bacon, Rick Jervis and Christopher Cann
USA TODAY

Thunderstorms and the threat from rising waters in south central Texas on July 13 hampered the grim search for survivors and victims of the flooding that swept through the region more than a week ago, killing over 100 people and leaving devastation in its wake.

All search and recovery operations along the Guadalupe River were suspended. Rescue personnel, equipment and vehicles “should be removed from the river area immediately,” Kerr County officials said in social media posts on July 13. It warned that up to 2 inches of rain could fall in an hour.

The National Weather Service warned that isolated areas could possibly be overwhelmed with an additional 9-12 inches and lead to flash flooding. The flood watch was in effect until

7 p.m. local time.

The confirmed death toll from the July 4 flooding had risen to 129 on July 12, including 103 in Kerr County alone. Kerr was one of more than a dozen counties listed in the weather service advisory.

‘Code Red’ in Kerr County

The Kerr County Sheriff’s Office issued a “Code Red” message on July 13. “This is not an evacuation, but a preparation notification,” the sheriff’s office said in the social media post. “Be prepared to evacuate along the Guadalupe River due to bad weather and flooding.”

A candlelight vigil planned for July 13 in Ingram, in Kerr County, was postponed because of the flood threat. No new date was announced.

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Severe thunderstorms prompt emergency flash flood warnings on the banks of the Guadalupe River on July 13 in Kerrville, Texas. JIM VONDRUSKA/GETTY IMAGES

