

# Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

**Date: January 19, 2021**

**Place: Remote Meeting via Zoom**

***In attendance:*** Committee Members Bob Curley, Julie Strehle, Andy McElaney, Evan Sheehan, Dave Anderson, Davalene Cooper, Kristen Dziergowski, Victor Baltera, Tina Sherwood, Alan Macdonald, Brenda Black, Eryn Kelley, Nancy MacDonald, Elizabeth Claypoole, George Danis and Town Accountant Sue Nickerson.

***Absent:*** No one

***Call meeting to order:*** Chair Curley called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm and read the following statement:

“This meeting is being held remotely as an alternate means of public access pursuant to an Order issued by the Governor of Massachusetts dated March 12, 2020 Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law. You are hereby advised that this meeting and all communications during this meeting may be recorded by the Town of Hingham in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. If any participant wishes to record this meeting, please notify the Chairman at the start of the meeting in accordance with M.G.L. c. 30A, § 20(f) so that the chair may inform all other participants of said recording.”

***Agenda items:***

***Comments from the public regarding items not on the agenda:*** None

***Budget Items:***

- **Treasurer/Collector:** Andy McElaney presented this budget. Town Treasurer Jean Montgomery request \$357,327 in Salaries, \$49,820 in Expenses and \$10,000 in Tax Title costs for a total of \$417,147 (-\$2,519; -0.6%). Salaries decreased by \$5,419 (-1.5%), reflecting a reorganization and the resignation of a long term employee who was replaced by a new person at a lower salary. Expense increases of \$2,900 (6.2%) reflect higher postage due to the inability to meet in person. Tax Title is flat to FY 21. Mr. McElaney recommended this amount.

Ms. Montgomery noted the dual roles of the Department. The Treasurer function is responsible for managing the Town’s cash and investments, issuing debt, tax liens, and low value land auctions. The Collector function is responsible for issuing and collecting on tax bills and any related actions. The Department has been able to adapt to the hybrid working model necessitated by COVID-19 since most services are on-line. She noted that tax collections were down slightly

(1.0%) to historic levels but also noted that this was due to State issued guidelines allowing taxpayers an additional month to pay taxes due to COVID-19. She further noted that collections are now consistent with prior years' levels.

- Assessors: Davalene Cooper presented this budget. Director of Assessing Erin Walsh requests \$261,635 in Salaries, \$14,513 in Expenses, \$37,190 in Reevaluation services, \$500 in Mapping Services for a total of \$313,838 (decrease of \$30,748; 8.9%). Ms. Cooper recommended this amount.

Salaries decreased by \$17,438 (6.2%) due to a reorganization and additional hours for one part time associate and replacement of a retired long term employee. The increased salary for the part time person is being offset by a reduction in the reevaluation service expense. Expenses increased by \$3,000 (26%) due to a new consulting contract. Reevaluation services decreased by \$10,810 (22.5%) as some of this work is now handled internally. The decrease in mapping services (\$5500; 92%) reflects the in house services to be provided by the new GIS coordinator.

Ms. Walsh noted the department is responsible for equitably determining the value of real and personal property in the Town by January 1<sup>st</sup> each year in accordance with State law. She noted that Town real property is assessed at \$7.5 billion while personal property is assessed at \$108 million.

- Human Resources: Brenda Black presented this budget. Human Resources Director Lisa Campbell requests \$147,624 in Salaries, \$3,650 in Expenses for a total of \$151,274 (\$12,427; 9.0%). Ms. Black recommended this amount.

Salary increases of \$12,127 (9.0%) reflect step and merit increases plus an increase in hours for the benefits coordinator. Expenses increased by \$300 (9.0%) due to the cost of a new legally required labor poster.

Ms. Campbell noted the department is responsible for managing the Town's human resource function for 200 full and part time non-School employees. She noted that workload increased due to COVID-19 as many people had qualifying events which enabled them to enroll or change coverage in various benefit plans. Additionally, the department is responsible for updating the wage and classification plan and collecting compensation data from benchmark communities.

- Information Technology (IT): Davalene Cooper presented this budget. Information Systems Manager Steve Becker requested \$295,439 in Salaries, \$276,714 in Expenses and a total of \$572,153. Ms. Cooper recommended this amount.

Salaries decreased by \$13,411 (4.3%) as the FY 21 budget includes overlapping salaries for the current manager, who is retiring, and his replacement. Expenses increased by \$14,925 (5.7%) due to increases in vendor agreements and COVID-19 related Zoom costs.

Mr. Becker stated that the Department is responsible for all Town (except the Light Plant) IT services and support. These services cover 26 departments, 3 websites, 11 social media platforms, telephones, servers and the connecting fiber optic cable network. COVID-19 added a significant workload as the Department needed to procure, set-up and distribute laptops and add 65 new VPN lines to the existing 52. The Department provides support to the Schools as part of their services and is credited for 20% of staff salaries.

- Veterans' Services: Kristen Dziergowski presented this budget. Veterans Agent Keith Jermyn requested \$109,522 in Salaries, \$8,610 in Expenses and \$171,796 in Veterans' Service Benefits. Ms. Dziergowski recommended this amount.

Salary increases of \$598 (0.5%) are for longevity, Expenses increased by \$832 (10.7%) due to upkeep and related costs for monuments. Veterans' Service Benefits decreased by \$25,150 (12.8%). Veterans' Service Benefits are legally required benefits that accrue to Veterans and qualifying survivors. These benefits are reimbursable by the State at 75%.

Mr. Jermyn noted that the Department's role is to advocate for and administer benefits to qualifying Veterans. This often requires direct contact with individuals who might otherwise have difficulty navigating on-line platforms. COVID-19 has forced the Department to resort to telephone calls and mailings which have added to the Department's workload. The Department also coordinates military ceremonies and events and liaises with various State and Federal authorities on behalf of Veterans. Additionally, the Department sponsors a military appreciation day for all Hingham High School sophomores at the Grand Army of the Republic Hall.

- Grand Army Hall: Kristin Dziergowski presented this budget. Veterans' Agent Keith Jermyn requests \$19,692 (\$817 increase; 4.3%). Ms. Dziergowski recommends this amount.

Veterans' Agent Jermyn noted that these expenses are for the maintenance of the Hall, one of only six remaining ones in the State. The Hall houses artifacts and relics from past wars and is in the process of acquiring status as a museum. Museum status requires a climate controlled environment and expenses are used to maintain the buildings HVAC system.

- Celebrations: Kristin Dziergowski presented this budget. Veterans' Agent Keith Jermyn requests \$17,107 (\$492 increase; 3.0%). Ms. Dziergowski recommends this amount.

Mr. Jermyn noted this budget is for mulching, floral planting and placing of wreaths at the Town's 21 military/veteran memorials, procuring and replacing metal grave markers of veterans and funds for coordination of various annual ceremonies.

- Town Accountant: Andy McElaney presented this budget. Town Accountant Sue Nickerson requests \$292,016 in Salaries, an increase of \$10,722 or 3.8%, \$11,355 in Expenses (flat to FY 20) and \$71,500 in Audit Services (flat to FY 20) for a grand total of \$374,871, an increase of \$10,722 or 2.9%. Salary increases of \$10,722 are due to step and longevity; Expenses and Audit are flat to last year. Mr. McElaney recommended the amounts requested.

Ms. Nickerson described the department's mission as managing payroll and accounts payable for the Town, Schools and the South Shore Emergency Communications Center (SSRECC). Additional responsibilities include coordinating the Town's annual audit, preparation of the State required Annual Financial Report, managing worker's compensation and unemployment, assisting with the annual budget, and the retirement office. COVID-19 has eliminated all in person meetings and the department has also been charged with handling the Town's reimbursement process with Plymouth County for all CARES ACT expenses.

- Reserve Fund: Victor Baltera presented this budget. Town Accountant Sue Nickerson requests \$664,578. This represents an increase of \$35,478 (5.6%). Mr. Baltera recommended the amount requested.

Mr. Baltera noted that, in accordance with the Town Financial Policy, this fund is set at approximately 0.75% of the operating budget and is used to cover overspending due to emergency or unexpected expenses. Typically these occur most often in the snow and ice budget, legal services, and police overtime but could arise in any other department as well. . He further noted that this account shows no actual expense as funds are transferred from this account to the requesting department where they are expensed.

- Debt Service: Evan Sheehan presented these budgets . Town Accountant Sue Nickerson requests \$4,122,877 in principal, \$1,584,499 in interest and \$196,262 in unused non-excluded debt capacity for a total of \$5,903,638. Mr. Sheehan recommended this amount.

Mr. Sheehan noted this amount for principal and interest is the legally required payment on debt issued by the Town for various capital projects. The unused non-excluded debt amount represents the debt that is paid off during the year. The Town has determined to continue to accrue these funds in order to help defer future borrowings.

- Employee Benefits: Evan Sheehan presented these budgets. . Town Accountant Sue Nickerson requests the following amounts and Mr. Sheehan recommended these amounts:
  - a. Contributory Retirement: \$5,443,559;
  - b. Employer's Medicare: \$1,177,935
  - c. Group Insurance: \$7,347,181
  - d. Other Post-Employment Benefits: \$1,267,567
  - e. Unemployment Compensation: \$30,000
  - f. Workers Compensation: \$330,000

Mr. Sheehan noted these accounts reflect legally required and formulaic derived amounts to fund Retirement, Medicare, Other Post-Employment Benefits and Workers Compensation. Ms. Nickerson noted that Group Insurance is estimated at a 10% increase to FY 21 as new rates will not be available until March 2021.

- Unclassified: Evan Sheehan presented this budget. Town Accountant Sue Nickerson requests \$1,028,087 which reflects a \$268,454 (35.3%) increase over the FY 21 budget. Mr. Sheehan recommends this amount.

Ms. Nickerson noted that this account is for the Town's General Liability Insurance. She further noted that the Town has experienced several large claims over the past several years (High School fire, East School flood, Middle School roof) which are the basis for the rate increase. The Town expects to explore its insurance options with a Request for Proposal later this year. Other items that have previously been included under Unclassified have been moved this year to the Board of Selectman budget.

- Dispatch: Evan Sheehan presented this budget. Town Accountant Sue Nickerson requests \$941,182 which reflects a decrease of \$5,278 (0.56%) over the FY 21 budget. Mr. Sheehan recommends this amount.

Ms. Nickerson stated that this account represents the Town's required contribution to the South Shore Emergency Response Center's (SSRECC) budget. This amount is a placeholder as the SSRECC budget process is not yet completed.

***Approval of Minutes:***

- a) The minutes of the November 17<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved by a roll call vote of 14-0-0.
- b) The minutes of the November 19<sup>th</sup> meeting were approved by a roll call vote of 9-0-5. Abstaining were Tina Sherwood, Brenda Black, Alan Macdonald, Eryn Kelley and Nancy MacDonald.
- c) The minutes for December 22<sup>nd</sup> were deferred until the next meeting.

***Liaison Reports:***

- a) Dave Anderson reported that the School committee was currently reviewing a level services budget with a 5.9% increase due in part to a number of COVID-19 related one-time costs and a 10.1% increase budget described as a recovery budget.
- b) Julie Strehle reported that the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) has identified the following projects for funding:
  - a. Lehner Property: Debt payment of \$656,313 (includes an almost doubling of the required annual principal payment) in order to accelerate the retirement schedule for this debt;
  - b. Benjamin Lincoln House purchase debt payment of \$140,000. This payment was approximately 20% over the required amount in order to meet the legally required disbursement for historical properties and accelerate the retirement schedule for this debt;
  - c. Hingham Affordable Housing Trust: \$700,000;
  - d. Harbor Development consulting: \$60,000;
  - e. Restoration of Military memorials: \$15,000;
  - f. Bare Cove Restroom: Build an eco-friendly bathroom: \$67,800;
  - g. Administrative expenses: \$10,000.
- c) Brenda Black reported that the Climate Action Plan Task Force was sponsoring two Warrant Articles:
  - a. Request funds to develop a Climate Action Plan for Hingham to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2040 (funding request to follow);
  - b. Creation of a Climate Action Planning Committee.
- d) Chair Curley reported that there may not be a tree preservation Warrant Article and that there will be one seeking funding for the design phase of the proposed Public Safety Building.
- e) Davalene Cooper reported on status of various properties under the control of the Hingham Affordable Housing Trust. These properties include ones on Cushing Street, Rhodes Circle, Whiting Street and Central Street. In addition, Ms. Cooper stated that additional property on Cushing Street might become available to the Trust.
- f) Libby Claypoole noted that there will be a Warrant Article for reconstruction of the Town Pier Wharf this year. A planned FY 21 Article had been pulled after review by the Town Engineer of the planned height of the wharf and the overall cost versus estimates and is now planned to be submitted this year.

- g) Victor Baltera noted that the Planning Board is reviewing four proposed Zoning Articles. Two of the proposals are to amend the Planning Board's site plan review process and the Accessory Dwelling zoning by-law to allow accessory dwelling units in detached structures. The other two articles Articles would update the Town flood plain maps to comply with new Federal maps and an update to the Town flood plain by-laws to comply with State requirements.
- h) Brenda Black commented that the Light Plant will submit a Warrant Article to build a substation and install a third transmission line to improve redundancy and capacity in the Town's electric supply.

***AdCom Housekeeping items:***

Chair Curley announced the following:

- a) AdCom will next meet January 26<sup>th</sup>;
- b) BOS will finalize their budget review by the end of January, Chair Curley estimated AdCom will require four more sessions to complete its budget reviews;
- c) Members were queried to determine their availability to meet the week of February school break (most are available);
- d) Requested volunteers to review AdCom Policies and Procedures. Davalene Cooper offered to head up the review;
- e) Town Meeting deadlines:
  - a. Town elections are mandated by State law and fall on May 1<sup>st</sup> this year;
  - b. Town Meeting typically occurs before the election to avoid the possibility that a newly constituted selectboard is not comprised of the same individuals who investigated and acted on the Warrant Articles. Possible dates are Saturday April 24<sup>th</sup> for an open air Town Meeting during the day which could be problematic as this is the end of April vacation and many people (especially parents of school aged children) might not be able to attend due to vacation plans or alternatively Monday April 26<sup>th</sup> which might require an indoor meeting which is not favored due to the pandemic.
- f) Warrant Article editing will again be handled by Davalene Cooper and Nancy MacDonald.

***Matters not anticipated within 48 hours:*** None

***Adjourn:*** Roll call vote to adjourn at 10:22 pm (14-0-0)

Respectfully Submitted,  
George Danis, Secretary

List of Documents Distributed for this Meeting:

Agenda;

Budget books for AdCom members to use in reviewing Departmental budgets;

Minutes: November 17<sup>th</sup> and November 19<sup>th</sup>.

Approved on 02/02/2021 by roll call vote (14-0-0)