

Select Board

February 1, 2021

Present:

- Select Board: Mr. Joseph Fisher (Chair) and Ms. Liz Klein, and Mr. Bill Ramsey
- Mr. Tom Mayo, Town Administrator
- Ms. Michelle Monsegur, Assistant Town Administrator for Finance
- Mr. Art Robert, Assistant Town Administrator for Operations

7:00 PM: Call to order

Mr. Fisher called the meeting to order 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 chair 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. “

No one indicated they were recording. Select Board members participating in the meeting were himself, Mr. Bill Ramsey and Ms. Liz Klein.

7:03 PM: Chair Julie Strehle called to order the meeting of the Advisory Committee.

7:03 PM: Chair Kerry Ni called to order the meeting of the Hingham School Committee.

7:04 PM: Chair Eric Valentine called to order the meeting of the Capital Outlay Committee.

Approval of Minutes

Vote: Mr. Ramsey made a motion to approve the minutes dated January 18, 2022. Ms. Klein seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Klein: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

Vote: Ms. Klein made a motion the minutes dated January 20, 2022. Mr. Ramsey seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Klein: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

Presentation and discussion of the report of the Town Administrator’s Sustainable Budget Task Force

Mr. Mayo explained that the Sustainable Budget task Force was created as a way to better inform long and short-term budgeting plans and to create an annual budgeting process that works in a sustainable way. He outlined their charge as follows:

1. Determine the structural budget gap for FY23
2. Examine potential non-tax and non-override revenue
3. Benchmark municipal and school budget performance
4. Evaluate strategies to properly staff municipal and school
5. Assess the impact increased taxes and fees will have on taxpayers and residents
6. Prioritize programs or other expenditures for funding
7. Analyze the impact to municipal and school programs of failure to implement SBTF recommendations

He thanked the members of the Task Force for all their work. He also said that what Hingham is facing is similar to many other communities in Massachusetts. He said that it is difficult to attempt to control tax impacts to residents while also providing appropriate services. He felt that there were three main components to budgeting in a sustainable way:

1. Control expenses/growth rates
2. Optimize utilization of existing revenues
3. Find new revenue streams (or ways to adjust pre-existing revenue streams)

Some realities the Town is contending with are:

1. Market pressures (costs increasing well beyond 2.5% revenue growth rate on a regular basis, in all aspects of services...Capital items, contracted work, daily expenses...etc.)
2. Constant new unfunded mandates, updated industry standards, new codes...etc. that stress existing budgets
3. FY22 budget process created a \$5M hole that was approved at Town Meeting
4. Significant amounts of one-time federal funds available for COVID-19 expenses that the Town wants to utilize, though in many ways, that money is only usable for items found in the operational budget, thereby creating a deficit for the next fiscal year (a problem local governments are facing across the country)
5. New growth is down significantly with the delays in South Hingham development and the dearth of new residential developments

Ms. Liz Klein, along with other Sustainable Budget Task Force members, presented their report to the Town Administrator and Select Board. The full report can be found at <https://www.hingham-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/13565/Sustainable-Budget-Task-Force-Final-Report-13122>. Members of the Task Force include:

- Liz Klein (Chair), Select Board member
- Nes Correnti, School Committee member
- John Ferris, Director of Business and Support Services, Hingham public Schools
- Dr. Gary Maestas, Interim Superintendent, Hingham Public Schools
- Michelle Monsegur, Assistant Town Administrator for Finance
- Donna Smallwood, former Advisory Committee Chair

Ms. Klein said that the Task Force was created to assess future needs and explore revenue opportunities (including a potential operational override) to balance FY23-27 budgets. The Task Force was charged with creating a sustainable budget for the next five fiscal years, which would include providing services that meet the expectations of residents while also meeting ongoing expenditure obligations through regularly occurring revenues. The Task Force went through their report the Town's problem, potential

solutions, revenue and expenditure research and analysis, a community snapshot and benchmarking data, three budget scenarios and Task Force recommendations for moving forward. Dr. Maestas and Mr. Ferris shared their perspectives.

The Task Force concluded that the Town should focus on economic development, given that there are no new short-term revenue streams. They said that the Town must manage personnel costs and strive to manage expenses to 3.5% budget growth, which they found to be conservative yet realistic. They recommended that the municipal government and the Schools work collaboratively year-round. Ms. Klein added that, as typical, the Advisory Committee would hold budget hearings during February and March with public discussions of the budget options prior to the Annual Town Meeting in April.

There was a robust question and answer session following the presentation, with comments and questions from the School Committee, the Advisory Committee, the Capital Outlay Committee, as well as residents. Discussions included federal funds, economic development opportunities in South Hingham, override data from benchmark towns, a suggested reassessment of property values, population growth in Hingham and proposition 2 ½, among other topics. Ms. Klein reported that the Task Force would be holding office hours on February 9 at 12:00 PM for residents with questions.

Diane Di Napoli, 16 Gardner Street, asked what kind of services would be added in Scenario C. Ms. Klein said that the Task Force focused on budget growth rather than specific budget line items.

Priya Howell, 26 Del Prete Drive, thanked the Task Force and asked about the correlation between property taxes and per capita income as compared to Hingham's benchmark towns. She expressed her support for Scenario C and encouraged the Town to work towards that.

Mr. Joshua Ross, 125 Wompatuck Road, asked about fund balance. Ms. Monsegur explained that part of the reason fund balance increased so much last year was due to the receipt of Federal funds, and also to updates to the Town's Financial Policy. Ms. Monsegur clarified that the 3.5% budget increase was seen as a broad Town-wide increase.

Mr. Ray Estes, 92 Forth Hill Street, made some comments regarding taxes and benchmark towns.

Mr. John Borger, 53 Lafayette Avenue, asked if there was data on how many people would be harmed from the potential increase in taxes. There was some discussion regarding the tax abatement process.

Sarah Melia, 86 Hersey Street, member of the Advisory Committee, asked about targeted tax relief that could be offered to citizens in need. Ms. Monsegur said that this was the first year of the means tested tax relief program so she suspected that the number of people would increase over the years. There were approximately 300 people that qualified under the State's requirements and 21 out of 24 Hingham applications were approved.

Tina Sherwood, 16 Partridge Drive, member of the Advisory Committee asked if the additional budget requests in the FY23 budget (for additional firefighters and Police Officers, Sustainability Director, requests by the School Committee, etc.) were included in Scenario C. Those positions were included in Scenario C but not Scenario B. She also asked about the rationale for pushing an override off to 2024. Ms. Klein presented the following reasons:

- The COVID-19 pandemic continues
- Significant Federal Funds remain available
- Updated Financial Policy allows for use of Unassigned Fund Balance under emergency circumstances to protect and stabilize Town resources and operations
- Excess Unassigned Fund Balance is approximately \$12 million.
- School strategic planning process and staffing audit are currently in progress
- Significant leadership changes in Hingham Public Schools
- Inadequate time for the community to consider and assess the implications of an override

9:24 PM: The meeting of the Advisory Committee adjourned.

9:25 PM: The meeting of the School Committee adjourned.

9:26 PM: The meeting of the Capital outlay Committee adjourned.

Lincoln Day

The members of the Select Board read the Lincoln proclamation, which urges each citizen to participate in some concrete way in the strengthening and preservation of the community of Hingham and the broader communities of state and nation. The Lincoln Day event will take place on Saturday, February 19 at the Old Ship Meetinghouse.

Vote: Mr. Ramsey made a motion to proclaim Saturday, February 19, 2022 as Lincoln Day in the Town of Hingham. Ms. Klein seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Klein: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

COVID-19 Update

Mr. Mayo gave the following update on the Covid-19 crisis:

“The Department of Public Health is reporting that the 7-day average of confirmed Covid-19 cases in the state has declined substantially from 9,509 on January 24 to 4,803 on January 30. Statewide hospitalizations have fallen from 2,783 on January 22 to 2,202 on January 28. The latest data shows the Hingham case count is also declining. The DPH is reporting 118 new daily Covid-19 cases in Hingham during the 14-day period ending January 22 compared to 174 cases over the 14-day period ending January 20, 2022. It is important to note that many residents are now taking home-based testing, which is most often not reported, and therefore not in these statistics. As a result, we are assuming that the actual number of positive cases is higher than these statistics show. Data shows that the overall vaccination rate for Hingham is now 83% for fully vaccinated individuals. Further, 48% of residents have received a booster dose. According to the DPH, 66% of Hingham residents ages 5 to 11 are fully-vaccinated.

The Town of Hingham continues to conduct a regional Covid-19 drive-through testing site in partnership with Hull, Cohasset, and Scituate at 335 Lincoln Street in Hingham. The testing center will be open on Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 7:00 am to 4:00 pm. PCR tests are available at no cost to the public. Residents and employees of the four communities will continue to have priority

appointment access from 7:00 am to 11:00 am daily. Online pre-registration is required. No tests will be administered without an appointment. I am disappointed with the test site's performance and volume and will be working with the vendor to improve and evaluate the performance at that site.

The Town of Hingham has received over 16,000 rapid antigen tests from Plymouth County for distribution. The Town is preparing to distribute these test kits to Hingham residents and we will use the drive through site that has been set up at 335 Lincoln Street. Kits will be distributed on two days, including Sunday, February 13 from 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm and Tuesday, February 15 from 1:00pm to 4:00 pm. It is important to note that those dates are not days that the testing clinic will be open. Two kits, holding a total of four tests, will be distributed to drivers of vehicles with a driver's license showing a Hingham address. This allows us to distribute the tests to Hingham residents. More information will be made in the coming days so please monitor our website for more details.

Regarding public health protocols, please continue to take precautions to protect yourself and others from Covid-19. As we all know, vaccination, wearing face coverings, practicing social distance, and frequently washing hands, among other measures, help protect us all from Covid-19. On January 7, 2022, the Hingham Board of health issued a health Advisory strongly recommending the use of face coverings by all patrons, visitors, and employees within any indoor space open to the public in Hingham. The Health Advisory is directed to all visitors and employees within any indoor space in all public places, public housing, assisted living facilities, membership associations and workplaces in Hingham. The CDC and the Massachusetts DPH guidance on face coverings can be found on their respective websites. The Board of Health recommends the use of a N95, KN95 or nonwoven multiply surgical mask. Gators and bandanas provide significantly less protection against this airborne respiratory virus. Also, remember that any face covering should be fitted close to one's skin to prevent unwanted gaps or leaks."

Mr. Mayo also noted that a significant number of the Town's test kits have been made available to the Superintendent of Schools for distribution as he sees fit.

Rebecca Silva, 3 Stonegate Lane, and John Borger, 53 Lafayette Avenue asked questions about the test kits. Mr. Mayo clarified that tests would be given out on a first come first serve basis, two boxes per vehicle regardless of the presence of Covid symptoms.

Appointments

For a list of Talent Bank Applicants, please visit <https://www.hingham-ma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/12984/Talent-Bank-vacancies-and-applicants-102121>.

Vote: Mr. Fisher made a motion to appoint Mona Pohl to the Hingham Public Library Board of Trustees to fill an unexpired term ending June 30, 2024. Mr. Ramsey seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Klein: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

Public Comment

“The Hingham Select Board encourages community engagement and welcomes questions and comments as agenda items are discussed at the meeting. In addition, we have set aside up to fifteen minutes for public comment for items that fall under the purview of the Select Board and are not already on tonight’s agenda. If any guests wish to speak, please seek to be recognized. Once recognized, state your name and address and address your comments to the Chair. Comments will be limited to three minutes per speaker and must relate to topics within the scope of the responsibilities of the Select Board. Speakers are encouraged to present their remarks in a respectful manner and not to indulge in personalities. The Public Comment period is not a time for debate by members of the Select Board. The Select Board is not adopting or endorsing any of the comments made during the Public Comment period.”

Town Administrator/Select Board Reports

Mr. Mayo acknowledged the work of the DPW and HMLP during the recent storm.

Ms. Klein thanked the task force and all the meeting participants. She also thanks the DPW, HMLP, Fire and Police for their work during the storm.

Mr. Ramsey thanked the DPW for working throughout the night to remove snow from the Square.

Mr. Ramsey also reported that the Hingham High School wrestling team won its 10th straight conference title recently and noted that Hingham High School hockey coach, Tony Messina, recently earned his 200th win. He extended his congratulations to both.

Mr. Fisher also reported that he has received many compliments for HMLP and the DPW for their efforts during the storm.

Vote: Mr. Ramsey made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Klein seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Klein: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

The meeting adjourned at 9:46 PM.

Documents: A complete meeting packet of supporting documentation is on file and available for public review in the Select Board office.