

**Advisory Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
February 16, 2023  
Hingham Town Hall**

**In Attendance:** Chair George Danis, Nancy MacDonald, Davalene Cooper, Caitlyn Kirk, Brenda Black, Alan Macdonald, Carol Tully, Brian Stack, Sarah Melia, Kathy Curley, Joe Griffin, Tina Sherwood, Jason Price, Lyndsey Kruzer

**Absent:**

**Participating Remotely:** Andy McElaney

**Call Meeting to Order:** Chair Danis called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. 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.”*

Select Board Chair Bill Ramsey called the Select Board to order, adopting the same statement that Chair Danis used above.

School Committee Member Michelle Ayer called the School Committee to order, adopting the same statement that Chair Danis used above.

**Comments from the public on Items not on the Agenda**

There were no comments.

**Joint session with the Select Board and the School Committee to hear a presentation of the proposed FY 24 School budget**

Presentation of the FY24 School Budget by Dr. Margaret Adams, Superintendent of Schools, Aisha Oppong, Director of Finance and Operations, Katie Roberts, Asst. Superintendent, and Suzanne Vinnes, Executive Director of Student Services.

The presentation covered:

- Leadership Team’s Budget Priorities
- Hingham Public Schools Strategic Plan
- Current Budget Drivers
- Update on MTSS and SEL
- Special Education Enrollment Trends
- Social Emotional Trends
- Financial and Enrollment Data

- Three Budgets
  - Level Services Budget
  - Balanced Budget or Reduced Services Budget
  - Unmet Needs

A question and answer session followed the presentation.

With the decrease in enrollment numbers, how does that affect the budget? Overall the schools are seeing an increase in special education and SEL needs. In this economy, costs are not going down. As an example, for an elementary school with 23 students in a class, you need a teacher. In middle school and high school, there needs to be a seat for every student, for 7 periods – it is run by schedule, not by classroom.

What are the factors that are driving special ed numbers so much higher? The pandemic has had a serious impact on children’s learning and school behaviors. The difference between an IEP and a 504 plan is whether or not the child requires services, or accommodations.

The budget increase for the schools is 5.14% for this year. The growth rate recommended by the SBTF is 3.5%. Does the SC believe they can achieve that growth rate going forward? Must keep in mind the significant budget drivers including special education and fuel costs, as well as the increases in personnel costs. The schools are significantly impacted by those economic factors.

Several citizens made comments for the SB / SC and Advisory Committee and covered many topics.

- The level of cuts being proposed for the balanced budgets will be devastating and deeply affect Hingham’s students. Please support fully funding the schools and please fund the additional requests as well as the level services budget.
- There are important details that are yet to be determined. The schools are showing an increase to their level services budget at 5% - while level services for peer communities are between 2.5 and 4%. And though Needham is at 5% this year, their budget request funds over 14 new FTEs. Hingham needs to reset the base with an override and then focus on keeping revenue and expense rates in alignment. With new revenue at 2.5% - the town will need regular overrides with these growth rates. Discussion about an MOU is important.
- Please support the override to maintain level services. From 2010 to 2023 the Town proposed level services with restructured revenue for the school budget. The revenue was never enough and the School Committee always had to deal with cuts to the budget instead of having the money to grow the budget to where it needed to be.
- It is vital that we adopt an override to right size the budget to support the schools needs, as well as town wide, for public safety, DPW and all town services. We’ve known for well over a decade we would need an override. Where fees have been discussed, we need to remember that this is public education. Fees should be paid for, to the largest extent possible, by the Town. There are customary fees that are reasonable – but parents are becoming exhausted by paying ever-increasing fees. Please think about this as public education and do not target individual users to support the needs of the school.
- It is concerning to recommend that the schools share specialists between elementary schools as these specialists are needed throughout the day at each school. An example of this is that specialists are needed for both pick-up and drop off at each school and should not be required to drive between schools and split these responsibilities among the schools. Please support fully funding the school budget.

School Committee Chair Michelle Ayer called for an adjournment of the School Committee which was voted and approved.

**Hear and discuss updates to the proposed municipal budgets including additional spending requests**

Town Administrator FY24 Budget Recommendations (Non-School) – presented by Tom Mayo, Town Administrator. The points in the presentation included:

- FY24 Budget Context
- Municipal Balanced Budget (Reductions)
- Town Administrator FY24 Recommended Budget
- Next Steps & Questions

Total FY24 Additional Requests \$2,720,551

This budget will be discussed again at an upcoming meeting.

Select Board Chair Bill Ramsey called for an adjournment of the Select Board which was voted and approved.

**Warrant Articles: Hearing, discussion and possible vote on the following Articles:**

R: Amend General By-Laws Article 18—Fees for Plumbing and Gas Permits (J. Griffin)

The fees were last adjusted in 2012. Recognizing that the fees are too low and out-of date and the need to keep the revolving fund solvent, the building department looked at more than 1,000 permit applications and the revenue that was received. There are approximately 30 new fees. It is critical that fees be set at appropriate levels such that necessary monies can be withdrawn from the revolving funds which will be addressed in Article I. Moving forward, the adoption of increasing these fees will be able to be done by the Select Board, as necessary.

A motion was made to approve Article R, seconded and approved by a vote of 14-0.

Z: Electrical Permit Fees (J. Griffin)

This Article amends the general bylaws of Article 29 with regard to electrical permit fees by deleting the current language of Article 29 and substituting the new language from Article Z that will include a list of approximately 30 new electrical permit fees. The reasons are similar to those of Article R. The Town needs to set fees at appropriate levels and needs to keep the revolving fund solvent. The building department reviewed over 900 permit applications to determine range of new fees. Moving forward, the authority to increase these fees will be given to the Select Board, who may also act as appropriate and necessary. The last time these fees were reviewed was 2010. With these new rates, the Town's fees will be at the median of our benchmark communities.

A motion was made to approve Article Z, seconded and approved by a vote of 14-0.

V: Permitting and Design of Inner Harbor Coastal Structures (K. Curley)

This Article was brought forward by the Harbor Development Committee. The committee requires these funds to complete the permitting process due to the fact that the state made changes to the process and the fees have increased since the design was begun in 2015.

A motion was made to approve Article V, seconded and approved by a vote of 14-0.

### **Liaison Reports**

Cleaner Greener Hingham (T. Sherwood)

The two plastic water ban bylaw Articles were heard by the Select Board and passed unanimously. B. Stack and T. Sherwood will be working on the comment for an upcoming meeting.

### **Forecast update: Sue Nickerson, Town Accountant (10:05pm)**

There are very few changes. Local receipts increased by \$900,000 and Article 6 went up by about \$45,000. Article 4 has gone down by \$395,000. The meals tax number was increased by \$50,000 and may hit \$1mm for the first time. Investment income was increased by \$400,000. This is the most volatile area to predict. Interest rates have gone down so that improves the debt, but decreases the investment income. The next forecast will have the new insurance rates which come out March 2, 2023. There is a budget forecast meeting scheduled for March 3, 2023

### **Discussion of Advisory Committee Housekeeping Items:**

Approval of Minutes from the February 7, 2023 AdCom meetings

- The meeting minutes were deferred for vote at an upcoming AdCom meeting.

Upcoming meetings:

- February 21, 2023
- February 28, 2023: Joint hearing on Capital Outlay Budget with the Select Board and the School Committee.

**The meeting was adjourned at pm. by roll-call vote (14-0).**

### **Documents Distributed for this Meeting:**

AdCom February 16, 2023 Meeting Agenda  
Feb 16th Select Board - FY24 Budget Presentation  
AdCom Article Assignments 2022-2023

**Respectfully Submitted,  
Tina Sherwood  
Secretary, Advisory Committee**