

Select Board

February 16, 2022

Present:

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

7:01 PM: Call to order

Mr. Bill Ramsey called the meeting to order and adopted the following statement that had been previously read by Chair George Danis of the Advisory Committee:

“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 that they were recording.

He announced that Select Board members participating in the meeting were himself, Bill Ramsey, Ms. Liz Klein and Mr. Joe Fisher. The meeting was conducted both in person and remotely via Zoom.

Also in attendance were members of the Hingham Advisory Committee and the Hingham School Committee.

Joint Session with the Advisory Committee and School Committee

FY24 School Department Budget Presentation

School Superintendent Dr. Margaret Adams and Ms. Aisha Oppong, Director of Finance and Operations, presented an overview of the FY24 budget for the Hingham Public Schools, which included:

- An introduction to the budget process, including budget priorities and current budget drivers
- An update on their Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) Academics and Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) data
- Financial and enrollment data
- Their level services budget
- A balanced budget/reduced services budget
- Unmet needs

The complete presentation can be found at <https://hinghamschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Feb-16th-Selectboard-FY24-Budget-Presentation.pdf>.

There were a number of questions from the Advisory Committee and Select Board members. Topics discussed included:

- The reduction of the full-day Kindergarten fee: Ms. Oppong noted that they hope to reduce and eventually eliminate this fee over time.

- The effect on the budget of decreased enrollment numbers: Ms. Opong reported that, while they are seeing an overall reduction in student enrollment, they have had an increase in special education and social and emotional learning needs in the district. She also cited the current inflation in the economy as another reason for why costs have not gone down with the decreased enrollment. She also that, because the poverty rate has gone down in Hingham, the schools have lost some DESE funding. Mr. Fisher asked for additional detail on enrollment predictions. Dr. Adams said that they have some enrollment data from the MSBA Foster School project, which predicted an increase in enrollment. She said that they plan to work harder to increase public awareness of all the great programs that the Hingham Public Schools have to offer. They hope to do this with the help of their Communications Specialist, a position that they invested in last year. Ms. Opong added that, when creating the FY24 budget, they did so under an assumption that the enrollment numbers would stay the same as the previous year. During the last 15 years, 10% of Hingham children went to private schools. That number increased to 20% during the pandemic.
- The decrease in learning loss that occurred during the pandemic and the ways this is assessed, including MCAS, Dibbles and others: Ms. Katie Roberts, Assistant School Superintendent, said that they have been tracking the students' foundational skills, primarily reading and mathematics, through different assessment tools. Dr. Adams said that they track skills throughout the year so that teachers can proactively respond to the needs of the students.
- The additional request for a Nursing Coordinator: Mr. Ramsey asked if they have considered asking a current nurse to take on additional responsibilities for additional compensation. Dr. Adams said that they could consider that, however they were hoping that this additional staff member could act as a substitute for other nurses and could help coordinate their schedules. She added that it has been very hard to find nursing substitutes.
- The increase in IEP numbers: Ms. Klein asked what is driving the increase in numbers of students with IEPs. Dr. Adams felt that this was, in part, due to the effect of the pandemic on children. She also felt that it could be due to the fact that they have been more closely looking at ways to help support students and what their needs are. She reported that there has been an increase in the social and emotional needs of students. She said that there has also been an increase in anxiety and a decrease in communication skills in younger children, possibly due to technology use.
- The music program: Mr. Fisher asked if they felt like the music program is supported appropriately in the level services budget. Dr. Adams responded that the music services are maintained as they currently are in the Level Services Budget, including maintaining the Director of Fine Arts. She said that the Director of Fine Arts, a position that was recently created, has been an enormous contributor to the Arts program, which suffered greatly during the pandemic. The Balanced Budget would eliminate this position and would also institute a fee for grade 5 instrumental music, which was a very difficult decision.
- Revolving Fund usage: Mr. Andy MacElaney, Advisory Committee member, asked about the proposed increase in revolving fund usage. Ms. Opong said that they plan to use the increased usage in upcoming years as well. Mr. MacElaney noted that the Sustainable Budget Task Force recommended a budget increase of no more than 3.5% annually and asked if the School

Department felt that would be sufficient. Ms. Michelle Ayer responded that it would depend on several factors, including which budget was approved.

There was additional discussion on out of district special education fees and the State's proposed 14% increase. Mr. Mayo reported that he had recently had a conversation with State Representative, Joan Meschino, where he asked for State assistance in addressing that 14% increase. Ms. Meschino told him that he had received similar inquiries from other communities as well and that she would look into the matter.

Additional funding sources were also discussed, such as the Parent Teacher Association, the Hingham Arts Alliance, the Hingham Educational Foundation, but it was noted that these should be supplemental to the School budget and not a way to fund the budget.

There were some questions from residents, including Ms. Melissa Sadler, 28 Highview Drive, who asked the Advisory Committee members to put forth a budget that fully funds Hingham Schools.

Ms. Mary Power, 1 King Phillip Path, said that, while she feels that it is time to consider an override, she felt that many details were still forthcoming. She voiced some concerns with the budget's 5 % increase, which she noted is higher than some peer communities. She felt that this increase was due to problems with both revenues and expenses. She also asked committee members to consider the economic diversity in Town when considering the override.

Ms. Liza O'Riley, 19 Porter's Cove Road, commented that an override has been discussed for many years. She thanked the Select Board for giving the residents the opportunity to vote on an override for the first time since 2010.

Mr. Ray Estes, 92 Fort Hill Street, felt that it is necessary to vote to adopt an override that would right-size the school budget, but one that would also support town-wide needs for public safety, the library and other necessary services that Hingham residents deserve. He also noted that an override has been discussed for over a decade and felt that it is overdue. In addition, he felt that the school budget should not be paid for through parental fees.

Ms. Brenda Green, 12 Polk Road, commented that, when Specialists are removed from the budget and become shared, the schools also compromise safety at drop-off and pick-up because the people in these roles perform more jobs than just those inside the classroom.

7:53 PM: The School Committee meeting adjourned.

Town Administrator FY24 Budget Recommendations (Non-School)

Ms. Michelle Monsegur and Mr. Tom Mayo presented. Areas covered in their presentation included:

- FY24 Budget Context: The Town is entering the FY24 budget season with a significant deficit that results from adding critical capacity to school and municipal services during COVID-19. As we move away from the pandemic and seek to bridge the funding gap permanently, the Town must

either reduce services to balance the FY24 budget or raise recurring revenue through an override to maintain current operations. As part of its key findings, the Sustainable Budget Task Force recommended that the Town should consider proposing a potential override in FY24 to maintain or grow services.

- **Municipal Balanced Budget (Reductions):** The Town is required by State law to adopt a balanced budget. The current deficit is \$6,221,696, as of January 30, 2023. The municipal target is \$2,177,594 (35%). Mr. Mayo said that their approach under the balanced budget would be to:
 - Meet contractual obligations and legal requirements
 - Maintain core municipal services
 - Remove new positions/services added in FY22
 - Spread impact among municipal departments/service sectors
 - Demonstrate community impact

If the override fails, reductions would go into effect July 1, 2023. Mr. Mayo proposed the following reductions to the budget:

- General Government: \$514,108 (5.7 FTEs)
- Public Safety: \$584,434 (4.6 FTEs)
- Public Works: \$489,873 (9.3 FTEs)
- Human Services: \$148,393 (2.1 FTEs)
- Culture & Recreation: \$495,567
- **Town Administrator FY24 Recommended Budget:** The Town Administrator's (TA's) recommendation contains the same level of services from 2023 with no service reductions. It also includes the level services budgets as presented by municipal departments to the Select Board and the Advisory Board in December and January. The TA's recommendation includes \$673,377 of the total \$1,164,277 additional requests from department heads, including:
 - Assistant Town Engineer - \$96,000
 - Senior Center Program Coordinator - \$65,255
 - Sustainability Coordinator - \$49,000
 - Increase Veterans' Administrative Assistant to FT - \$20,842
 - Budgeting software - \$50,000
 - Four FT Firefighters - \$392,280

There was some additional discussion regarding the presentation, with special attention concerning overtime in the Fire Department and the number of years until a subsequent override in the future. Advisory Committee Chair, George Danis, said that they would further evaluate the budgets at their next meeting.

Vote: Mr. Ramsey made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Fisher seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Klein: yes

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 PM.

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