

Board of Selectmen

February 23, 2021

Remote meeting via telephone conference call

Present:

- Board of Selectmen: Ms. Mary Power (Chair), Mr. Joseph Fisher and Mr. Bill Ramsey
- Mr. Tom Mayo, Town Administrator
- Ms. Michelle Monsegur, Assistant Town Administrator

7:00 PM: Call to order

Ms. Power 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.”

Ms. Power asked if anyone was recording the meeting. There were no responses.

Prior to the business of the meeting, Ms. Power asked the public to observe a moment of silence to remember the 500,000 lives now lost due to COVID-19; a number of these individuals had connections to Hingham.

Approval of Minutes

Vote: Mr. Ramsey made a motion to approve the minutes dated January 26, 2021. Mr. Fisher seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Vote: Mr. Fisher made a motion to approve the minutes dated February 2, 2021. Mr. Ramsey seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Requests to Approve Owner’s Refinancing for an Affordable Unit

Ms. Emily Wentworth, Senior Planner, presented. She said that the Town had recently received refinancing requests from owners of two affordable units. The owners would like to take advantage of the favorable interest rates. According to the deed restrictions of the affordable housing units, the

Selectmen and the Department of Housing and Community Development would act as the monitoring agents for these properties. She noted that the monitoring agents must approve refinancing terms prior to closing. She stated that she had reviewed the requests and felt that they comply with the refinancing requirements under the State's guidelines for deed-restricted units. Based on her review, she recommended that the Board approved these requests for refinancing.

Chestnut Gardens, 17 Weathervane Court

Vote: Mr. Ramsey made a motion that in connection with the request of the record owner of 17 Weathervane Court, an affordable unit, under a deed and deed rider recorded with the Plymouth County Registry of Deeds in Book 50288, Page 65, the Board:

1. Consent to the refinancing of the mortgage loan for said Unit for an amount not to exceed \$240,094, subject to the prior written approval of the Department of Housing and Community Development and all other applicable requirements of the deed rider for such Unit; and
2. Authorize the Town Administrator to provide written notice of the above.

Mr. Fisher seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Craftsman Village, 5 Taylor Lane

Vote: Mr. Fisher made a motion that in connection with the request of the record owner of 5 Taylor Lane, an affordable unit, under a deed and deed rider recorded with the Plymouth County Registry of Deeds in Book 44689, Page 89, the Board:

1. Consent to the refinancing of the mortgage loan for said Unit for an amount not to exceed \$226,242, subject to the prior written approval of the Department of Housing and Community Development and all other applicable requirements of the deed rider for such Unit; and
2. Authorize the Town Administrator to provide written notice of the above.

Mr. Ramsey seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Joint Session with the Advisory Committee and School Committee

7:08 PM: Chairman, Bob Curley, called to order the meeting of the Advisory Committee.

7:08 PM: Chairman, Kerry Ni, called to order the meeting of the School Committee

FY22 Financial Forecast Update

Mr. Mayo presented the 5-Year Annual Revenue Forecast. He reported on some changes to this forecast since the last presentation including:

- After consulting with the Assessor, “New Growth” has increased to \$700,000.
- Because “Meals Tax” revenue is projected to be down in FY22 and well as in FY21, Town Counsel has advised not to apply “Meals Tax” revenue to Debt Exclusions as in past years, but rather will be applied to “General Revenue.”
- The \$2.3 Million anticipated use of Fund Balance is a combination of the following items:
 - One-time Anticipated Lost Revenue due to the pandemic
 - One-time anticipated expenses identified by the Superintendent of Schools
- Capital Outlay and Article 6 represent Mr. Mayo’s request and the most recent budget that was presented by the Superintendent of Schools and the School Department on
- Total sources are \$133,221,848
- Total Anticipated uses are \$137,572,378
- The Total Deficit is \$4,550,530

Mr. Mayo explained that there is still a possibility for some changes in the near future when healthcare numbers are made available on March 1, 2021. Ms. Power noted the substantial improvement in the deficit since the forecast was last presented. Mr. Fisher asked if Mr. Mayo was forecasting a structural deficit on an ongoing basis. Mr. Mayo said yes. Ms. Power added that, if the Town would like to apply Meals Tax revenues towards offsetting the cost of the Middle School, such a decision would be the subject for future Warrant Articles for future years.

Ms. Libby Claypoole, member of the Advisory Committee, asked about the structural deficit. Mr. Mayo said that he felt they have the structural deficit represented shared costs throughout Town departments. He also felt that the Town had significant needs as related to deferred items, specifically items deferred by the DPW. He recommended that the Town increase the Capital Outlay budget by \$500,000 to accommodate for this deficit. There were some additional comments regarding the Capital Outlay budget from Advisory Committee member, Victor Baltera.

FY22 School Budget Presentation

Ms. Power reported that the role of the Board of Selectmen during the budget process is to gather information about each budget and ask questions that could inform the larger budget picture Town-wide. She said that the board takes this role very seriously and felt that it was especially important for all departments to work together this year during the pandemic. She also shared with the public the Town of Hingham Financial Policy, as developed by the Advisory Committee. She noted that the purpose of the document is to establish policies for managing expenditures to:

- Ensure the continuous delivery of Town services at a level that is consistent with the needs and expectations of its citizens;
- Ensure that people of varied economic means remain a part of our community;
- Provide for the acquisition and maintenance of appropriate infrastructure;
- Stabilize tax rates; and,
- Preserve the Town's credit rating (currently Aaa from Moody's, AAA from Fitch, and AAA from Standard & Poor's).

The entire Financial Policy can be found online at <https://www.hingham-ma.gov/383/Financial-Policy>.

Dr. Paul Austin, Superintendent of Schools, presented. He announced that the adopted budget of the School Committee will:

1. Provide for expanded Hingham's Tiered System of Support services (HTSS) necessary to remediate the loss of academic progress resulting from COVID 19.
2. Fund the process and development of a five-year Hingham Public Schools strategic plan.
3. Provide staffing and support for Special Education to ensure that the district is able to appropriately and adequately address the needs of students, staff and the community.
4. Fund resources required for year one (1) of the District's Equity and Inclusion plan.
5. Provide for needed personnel support for Central Office Administration, which includes the addition of a Payroll Clerk, and an Administrative Assistant to perform data analytics, and provide School Committee, Social Media and Communication support.

He also said that The Forecast Group recommended two basic assumptions for the FY 22 Budget:

1. The budget should focus on the essential needs of the district to recover from the impacts of COVID-19.
2. The budget should be based on the March 2020 enrollment due to the expectation that most students will return to Hingham Public Schools.
 - March 2020 enrollment: 4,319 students
 - February 2021 enrollment: 3,939 student

He continued to explain some key impacts of COVID-19, with special focus on fluency and retell in elementary age children and achievement gaps between all students, students with disabilities, and High Needs students pre-COVID-19.

His Middle School Grade Analysis showed an overall reduction of As and B and an increase in Cs (183), Ds (66), and Fs (78) in core academics. His High School Grade Analysis showed an overall reduction of Bs, Cs, and D, increase in As (744), and Fs (85).

Dr. Austin continued with an analysis of the social and emotional impacts of the pandemic on students of all ages. Attention also focused on special needs students and enrollment numbers.

He proposed the following budget:

- Personnel (84%): \$52,425,406
- Contracts (13%): \$8,143,112
- Other (3%): \$1,909,702

There was also additional focus on:

- Offsets to the proposed budget
- Budget changes since January 2021,
- Revenue losses, Contracts, and Mandates
- The proposed Recovery Budget
- Per pupil costs as compared to benchmark towns
- Staffing issues
- Student/teacher ratios

Dr. Austin made the following comments with regard to a path forward:

- “The Administration understands that the proposed budget is substantial. However, we have shown that Covid-19 has resulted in a negative impact on our students, both academically and emotionally. Despite the financial burden of this proposed budget, we believe it is our ethical duty to put forth a budget that addresses the most immediate and pressing needs of our students.
- The proposed FY ‘22 budget includes funding for strategic planning that is much needed to guide the district for the next 5+ years. This process will be critical to ensure that the district is meeting the needs of its students in preparation for the future, accommodates the needs of the community, and provides a clear and manageable financial path forward.
- The proposed FY ‘22 budget includes funding to ensure that the services provided by the district are equitable and that every student finds growth, enjoyment, success, and confidence in their Hingham Public School Education.”

School Committee Chairman, Kerry Ni, added that the School Committee unanimously supports the proposed budget. She noted the special difficulties associated with creating a budget during the pandemic. She commented on how students would need extra support over the next few years resulting from the pandemic. She acknowledged that the proposed budget does not meet all of the needs of the entire school district and that is why one-time funds for a 5-year strategic plan have been proposed to allow the Superintendent the opportunity to comprehensively evaluate the district. She also acknowledged that there are several key proposed position that they could not include in this budget. She said that this budget does not provide for some needed new textbooks, some enrichment programs, clubs, extra-curricular activities, and expanded AP opportunities. She asked for support from the Board of Selectmen, the Advisory Committee, and Town Meeting for approving the proposed budget.

The entire presentation can be found online at https://hinghamschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/FY-22-Budget-Presentation_Board-of-Selectmen-and-Advisory-Committee2021_0223.pdf.

There were ensuing questions and discussions by the Board of Selectmen and the Advisory Committee regarding lower student achievement, remote learning and the impact on students, potential summer school, enrollment trends, non-and recurring expenses, and the potential dates for students to return to school. Ms. Power asked whether some requested new hires could sign on as contractual positions, opening up alternative funding sources. Dr. Austin explained the limitations of hiring due to Union requirements. There was additional discussion regarding potential cost savings due to teacher retirements and salary growth as related to an override. Ms. Power initiated a discussion regarding the projected growth of the School Department budgets by approximately 4 1/2% per year and asked Dr. Austin what steps might be taken to reduce the growth rate of future budgets. Dr. Austin said that the School Department is committed to using their resources to the best of their ability to meet the needs of their students.

Mr. Greg Corbett, 70 Winter Street, expressed his concern that the School recovery budget did not go far enough to fully fund the schools. He asked how much additional funding would need to be added to the budget to fund the recommended items not included in Dr. Austin’s proposed budget. Dr. Austin

suggested that the amount would be very substantial, but could not give an exact amount. Ms. Power commented that the Board is weighing all options related to an override, while also being mindful of the financial insecurity faced by many households due to the pandemic.

Mr. Mike Taylor, 20 Liberty Road, suggested increasing the cost for full-day Kindergarten could be a potential revenue source for the Town.

Ms. Lauren Burm, 5 Pinegrove Road, commented that she supported the budget as presented by Dr. Austin.

Ms. Priya Howell, 26 Del Prete Drive, made some additional comments in support of the recovery budget.

2021 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Article Discussion

Article T: Five-Year School Bus Lease

Mr. John Ferris, Business Director of HPS, explained that their current 5-year lease is coming to an end at the end of 2021 and they would like to enter into another 5-year lease. He said that, as required to Chapter 30b, they are required to obtain approval from Town Meeting for a lease greater than 3 years. Ms. Power felt that the program provided a cost savings to the Town. Mr. Ferris added that, at the end of the 5-year lease, if the budget allows, the School Department would have the opportunity to purchase another bus.

Vote: Mr. Ramsey made a motion to recommend favorable action of Article T. Mr. Fisher seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Article U: Plymouth River School Authorization to Borrow - Window Replacement Project

Mr. Ferris reported that the MSBA has just assigned an OPM to the project, who would be able to provide cost estimates in the near future. He estimated, however, that the cost could be approximately \$1.9 million. Ms. Power suggested that the Town would want to borrow the additional funds.

Mr. Ray Estes, 92 Fort Hill Street, member of the School Building Committee, suggested that, due to the MSBA timeline, may not have a better cost estimate in the next few weeks.

Ms. Power suggested that a vote not be taken tonight, in the hopes of getting a better cost estimate to include in the Warrant Article. She added that the MSBA requires the project to be fully funded at the beginning of the project. No action was taken by the Board.

Article V: Expand School Building Committee Authority

Mr. Ferris explained that Article V would ask the Town to authorize the 2017 School Building Committee to oversee the Plymouth River window project. He said that would be helpful because the members are

very familiar with the policies and procedures of the MSBA. He added that the School Committee has already voted favorable action of Article V.

Vote: Mr. Fisher made a motion to recommend favorable action of Article V. Mr. Ramsey seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Power: yes

9:56 pm: The Advisory Committee recessed and would resume to their publicly posted meeting.

9:57 pm: The meeting of the Hingham School Committee adjourned.

Possible Vote: Warrant Article M: Community Preservation Committee

Mr. Fisher noted that the Board had thoroughly vetted Article M at a prior meeting.

Vote: Ms. Power made a motion to recommend favorable action of Article M. Mr. Fisher seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Vote to file a petition with the Governor

Mr. Mayo explained that, at the beginning of the pandemic, the Governor of Massachusetts had authorized temporary legislation that allowed municipalities to extend their Town Meeting and local elections. The ability to extend the date of Town Meeting was enacted through the end of the Declaration of Emergency, whereas the authorization to extend the date of elections ended at the end of 2020. The local election in Hingham is always the Saturday following Town Meeting. In order for the Town to extend the local elections, the Town must petition the Governor to create a Special Act to do so. He anticipated that Town Meeting would take place in early May with an election after that. He explained that an Override cannot be on a ballot until 35 days after a Town Meeting. Ms. Power said that Town Meeting would take place outside on a Saturday, with a set rain date. She speculated that the meeting could take place on May 8 with the weekend of May 15 and 16 as a rain date. Mr. Mayo said that the MA Legislature is contemplating a state-wide initiative to allow any municipality to change their local election date, though this is still uncertain. Senator O'Connor suggested that Hingham petition the Governor for Hingham to do this at a local level. Town Counsel Coughlin explained that, if so enacted by the Governor, it would be a Special Act specifically affecting the Town of Hingham.

Mr. Shaun Galvin, 143 Fort Hill Street, asked for clarification on the date for Town Meeting. Ms. Power explained that Town Meeting is projected to take place outside on May 8, with rain dates of May 15 and 16. She added that there would be an indoor location set up in case there is bad weather on all three dates. She noted that some residents would not feel comfortable with an indoor setting due to the pandemic.

Vote: Mr. Ramsey made a motion to authorize the Town Administrator to file a petition, on behalf of the Board of Selectmen, with the Governor of Massachusetts under M.G.L. Const. Art. 2, § 8 to request that the Governor file and recommend a special law to the Massachusetts General Court to allow the Town of Hingham Board of Selectmen to postpone the Spring 2021 Town of Hingham municipal election to a date not later than June 30, 2021. Mr. Fisher seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Inside Town Finances: Volume 7: Expenses

Ms. Power presented the sixth in a series of presentations on Town Finances, “Expenses.” The entire presentation can be found online at www.hingham-ma.gov.

COVID-19 Update

Mr. Mayo gave the following update regarding the COVID-19 crisis:

COVID-19 Data

According to [public health data](#) from the MA Department of Public Health (DPH) released last week, the Town’s designation remains “yellow,” indicating a “medium risk” of spread in the community. There have been 106 new cases of COVID-19 in Hingham over the past 14 days, and a total of 1,525 cases in Hingham since the start of the pandemic. The average daily incidence rate for the Town of Hingham was 31.5 per 100,000 residents, and our percent positivity rate was 2.89% for the previous 14 days. Even though these numbers are lower than what was reported for our community last week, Hingham’s average daily incidence rate and percent positivity rate remain higher than the state averages for this reporting period, indicating a need for continued vigilance. As of today, confirmed COVID-19 cases in Massachusetts have risen to 540,794.

Vaccine Rollout

According to DPH’s [daily COVID-19 vaccine report](#), a total of 1,061,335 first doses and 414,941 second doses have been administered in Massachusetts as of today. 85.4% of the total doses shipped to our state have been reported as administered. At this time, all Phase 1 priority groups as well as the first two priority groups in Phase 2 are eligible to receive the vaccine in Massachusetts. Eligible Phase 2 individuals include people age 65+, individuals with two or more [certain medical conditions](#), and residents and staff of low-income and affordable senior housing. As we reported last week, on February 17th, the Town was informed that we will no longer be receiving first dose vaccines from the State. This means that we will not be able to schedule additional first-dose vaccination clinics in Hingham. Town staff have contacted individuals who pre-registered with the Town to inform them of this change and to redirect them to other vaccine resources. The State has indicated that Hingham will still receive second vaccine doses for individuals who already received their first dose through our local clinics. We have received second doses for Phase 1 individuals and first responders we served in early local clinics. We have also ordered second doses for our 75+ residents who were served in the local clinic on February 4th. I would like to recognize and thank our Health Department and Fire Department staff for all of their work throughout this process. They truly stepped up when residents needed them the most, and we are proud of the work the Town has done thus far to vaccinate our first responders, health care workers, and senior population.

Vaccine Resources

As the Commonwealth moves forward and as many more people become eligible to receive the vaccine, the State is placing an emphasis on mass vaccination sites and regionalized clinics. There is also a growing number of pharmacies and other retail locations administering vaccines. The State's Vaccine Finder website (vaxfinder.mass.gov) allows residents to search for vaccine sites and schedule appointments. DPH also recently announced that vaccine appointments are available at CVS pharmacies around the Commonwealth through the Federal Retail Pharmacy Program. Please visit www.cvs.com to schedule an appointment. The closest participating CVS pharmacies include CVS locations in Weymouth, Braintree, and Hanover. The best resource for COVID-19 vaccine information continues to be the mass.gov website. Residents can also call the State at 2-1-1 for assistance with vaccine information and appointments. Residents can also direct questions to CovidQuestions@hingham-ma.gov.

Public Comment

"The Board of Selectmen has set aside up to 15 minutes for public comment for items not on the Board's agenda, but within the purview of the Board of Selectmen, during which time we typically follow the guidelines of open meeting. We encourage speakers to present remarks in a respectful manner and not to indulge in personalities. The Public Comment time is not a period of debate for the Board of Selectmen and the Board is neither adopting nor endorsing any of the comments made during the Public Comment period."

There were no comments from the public

Selectmen/Town Administrator Reports

Ms. Power announced that members of the Board of Selectmen plan to attend the meeting of the Unity Council on Thursday, February 25 for a community discussion about race. The meeting is open to the public but does require registration. She encouraged interested residents to register.

Ms. Power reported that the next meeting of the Board of Selectmen would take place on Tuesday, March 2.

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

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Power: yes

The meeting adjourned at 10:28 PM.

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