

Hingham Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, March 5th, 2026, at 7:00 PM
Town Hall, 210 Central Street, Third Floor, South Meeting Room

In Attendance: Carol Tully, Chair, Kevin Freytag, Vice Chair, Ted Ciolkosz, Secretary, Brenda Black, Ben Burnham, Tina Sherwood, Jerry Seelen, Steve Pohl, Brian Stack, David Leiphart, Elaine Cusker, Michael Herde, Mary Power, Alan Macdonald, John Germain

1. The Chair called the meeting to order and read the following statement. This meeting is being held remotely/or in person as an alternate means of public access pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025 and all other applicable laws temporarily amending 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.
2. Warrants – Article EE, Hingham Municipal Light with Elaine Cusker presenting. The Advisory Committee (AdCom) discussed how best to communicate the impact of rate increases to the public within the commentary, with an emphasis on transparency and clarification around retained earnings. The impact of rate increases on households was particularly emphasized, noting rates are lower now than in 2014 when adjusted for inflation. It was also noted if the Town desired future commercial development the additional electric capacity this project could provide would be needed. It was decided to postpone the vote.

Article Y, the Sale of 8 Short Street, was presented by Michael Herde. The article asks if the Town will authorize the sale of this property ending the Town's responsibility to maintain it and potentially generating future property tax revenue. Per Hingham By-Law, Town Meeting must approve the use intended for any real property prior to its disposal or transfer. The Town proposes selling the property for any use permitted in Business A Zoning, but subject to a Preservation Restriction. The Town of Hingham, acting by and through its Historical Commission, will be responsible for monitoring and enforcing the terms and conditions of the Preservation Restriction. The future use of the property will be impacted by the current limited capacity of its septic system and available parking. The proceeds from any such sale would be deposited into the Capital Stabilization Fund (CSF; used to pay for capital equipment and/or capital projects) established in Article 13 at the 2023 Annual Town Meeting. Jerry Seelen questioned if the Select Board would need to come back to a future Town Meeting to approve the use once a buyer was found. It was generally agreed that the SB would not as zoning would determine whether the property met the definition of use. Michael made a motion to recommend a vote on the article which was approved 13-1, with Jerry dissenting and requesting to be recorded.

Article FF, the Transfer for Health Care Subsidy was then presented by AdCom member Steven Pohl and Town Administrator Tom Mayo. AdCom member Ben Burnham recused himself from the discussion. The intent of the article would be to provide a one-time subsidy to help pay for employees' healthcare premiums with no guarantee of future subsidies. Hingham currently splits healthcare costs 50-50, the lowest amount allowed by law, between the Town and employees and this subsidy would fund a 10% increase in the town's share for FY27, costing approximately \$1.3 million. Tom relayed the unions involved were supportive of this effort and they understood it was not guaranteed to reoccur. An additional \$50,000 is also being suggested to fund future research on total compensation and benefits to address if a 60/40 or other split could be offered to Town employees in the future, at what levels of premiums and copays, and whether it'd be offered via the GIC (MA Group Insurance Commission) or a private insurer.

The justification for using excess unassigned fund balance to pay for this subsidy is that the cost of health insurance had risen to emergency levels for employees. Although AdCom members generally disagreed with that argument stating this is a well-known issue and hardly a surprise. In fact, it should have been better anticipated, and the subsidy may very well run contrary to Town Financial Policy.

Jack Manning of the Personnel Board spoke to express his viewpoint that our current health insurance offering put the Town at a strategic disadvantage when it comes to recruiting and retention of employees. Further, that once the subsidy is offered it'd be difficult to then go backward, that we need to treat our employees fairly and strongly recommended the Advisory Committee support the effort. Mr. Manning further noted this could not be negotiated in collective bargaining as the healthcare benefit applies to all Town employees, not just union members.

Concerns about this becoming a recurring subsidy and its unaffordability through the normal budget process were brought up, as were discussions around the Town's very high healthcare loss ratio (estimated at around 125%, with a typical private insurer averaging an 85% loss ratio) making it impractical to obtain insurance anywhere but through the GIC, how high healthcare costs are impacting employees' paychecks, how Town healthcare costs are rising at about 8% annually which significantly affects lower-wage employees, and how this subsidy is intended to improve employee morale and retention.

Article M, Community Preservation Committee Recommendations presented by AdCom members Mary Power, Ben Burnham, Tina Sherwood and CPC Chair Nancy MacDonald. The CPC recommendations total \$1,863,538, leaving a surplus of \$41,532, which will be held in reserve for next year's budget. The proposed funding of these projects will meet the required ten percent (10%) allocations for historic preservation, open space, and affordable housing. Unanimously approved.

Article P, Construction of the Center for Active Living – sources of revenue & operating expenses, presented by Brenda Black, John Germain and Steven Pohl. A detailed discussion covered the proposed budget, funding sources, operational costs, building maintenance, revenue potential, and related town planning issues for the new HCAL facility and other town assets.

The earliest opening of a HCAL new building would be FY28, so these numbers are projections. Operating costs include salaries, benefits, utilities, sewer, water, and insurance. Electricity costs are estimated at \$41,361, reduced from an initial estimate of \$60,000, and solar installation could drop that cost to an estimated \$5,000 per year as power generated is used by the building "before the meter" during daylight hours. A new custodial position with a salary of \$72,000 plus \$15,000 benefits would be needed and additional expenses would include custodial supplies, office supplies, sewer, water, and insurance costs.

Total Year 1 operating expense are estimated at \$671,903 with the building open 5 days a week, and staffing spread across weekdays. Looking forward five plus years as programming and usage are expected to increase, additional staff (2-3 employees) would correspondingly be expected to cost between \$200,000–\$300,000 annually. Maintenance costs are often 1.50–2.00 dollars per square foot per year; for a large building, this could mean significant ongoing expenses. Building maintenance costs would also include roof repairs, HVAC, windows, and general upkeep, which should be budgeted proactively for this and all Town buildings.

Funding sources could include Article 6 budget support (\$410,000, approximately 70%), a State Formula grant (\$106,695, about 18%), COA gift account (\$25,557, about 4%), revolving accounts (\$43,973, about 7%), grants, and community donations. Volunteer hours (4,734 last year) are a

significant staffing resource and expected to increase with expanded space. Future funding may come from increased fees, fundraising, partnerships, and expanded programs.

Comments from the public mentioned funding sources could include things like program fees, rental of space for events, advertising, farmer's markets, craft fairs, and memberships. However, of note, the cafe may operate via a third-party contract or in-house staffing; design and staffing models are still under discussion and keeping meals affordable could be required per federal Title 3 regulations of the Older Americans Act. Also, given the land is under federal jurisdiction, concession agreements could be required for certain activities, which could limit some revenue-generating ideas, and while the building could be rented out after hours for community events, fundraising, and special events, the town's land transfer conditions emphasize public use.

Article Z, Sale of 230 North Street, presented by Ben Burnham. This Article asks Town Meeting to authorize, but not require, the Select Board to sell the property and buildings at 230 North Street, also known as the North Fire Station, with a proposal is to rezone it to "Business A" in order to match adjacent properties (the property was previously in Business A, but zoning was changed for municipal use and the new Public Safety Building serves the district previously served by the North Fire Station). The sale is supported by a motion authorizing the town to sell under applicable laws, with proceeds deposited into the capital stabilization fund. Motion was made to recommend with AdCom voting 13-1, Jerry Seelen voting no and asking to be recorded.

Zoning Article DDD, presented by Ben Burnham. This article asks if the Town will amend the Zoning Map Part A of the Town of Hingham to rezone the property located at 230 North Street from the "Official and Open Space" district to the "Business A" district. Jerry Seelen pointed out that this article should precede Article Z in the warrant, and the Select Board and Tom Mayo should be made aware. Motion made to approve the article, vote was unanimous.

Article HH, Citizens Petition for the Establishment of a Youth Commission presented by AdCom member Michael Herde. Like the Select Board, the Advisory Committee unanimously voted no action.

3. Liaison Updates – Ben Burnham spoke with School Building Committee Chair and HPS Superintendent to clarify HHS boilers could only receive MSBA funds if switching to heat pumps (not new gas boilers). School Committee is to get heat pump estimate without schematic drawings to better determine which path could be more cost effective for Town (independently paying for new gas boilers or opting for heat pumps MSBA could help fund). Brenda Black relayed the Town Sustainability Coordinator said National Grid could provide funding if HHS converted to heat pumps (back up boiler would still be gas).
4. Housekeeping – Chair Carol Tully handed out March 10th agenda with fund balance updates and a Forecast History from FY08 to FY27 prepared by Mary Power. Calendar items, AdCom to have meetings on Wednesday, 03/18 and Thursday, 03/19. Plan to finish on the 19th but keep 24th available if needed as articles are due on the 25th.
5. Motion to Adjourn – Unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted by Theodore D. Ciolkosz, Jr., Secretary