

Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

October 12, 2021

Remote Meeting via Zoom

**In Attendance:** Dave Anderson, Brenda Black, Davalene Cooper, George Danis, Kristin Dziergowski, Matt Goulet, Caitlyn Kirk, Alan MacDonald, Nancy MacDonald, Andy McElaney, Sarah Melia, Evan Sheehan, Tina Sherwood, Julie Strehle, Sue Nickerson.

**Absent:** Bob Curley

**Guests:** Diana Castaneda and Richard Tortora of Capital Advisors; Jim Taylor, Former AdCom Chair

**1. Call Meeting to Order**

At 7:00 pm, Chair, Julie Strehle, 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.”

Chair Strehle asked if any participants were recording the meeting. There were no responses.

**2. Comments from the Public Regarding Items Not on the Agenda.** There were no responses.

**3. AAA Bond Rating Discussion**

Presentation by Capital Advisors, Richard Tortora and Diana Castaneda gave a presentation on Hingham’s AAA bond rating – what it means and what its importance is for the Town.

Jim Taylor, former AdCom Chair, gave a recent history of the Town’s finances for perspective.

Richard Tortora of Capital Market Advisors discussed Hingham’s AAA bond rating from Moody’s, Standard & Poors, and Fitch. He reported that the town is doing ‘everything right.’ Mr. Goulet asked about the fees charged by the credit agencies. Credit rating fees are around \$30,000 per rating. Mr. Tortora estimates that the Town has saved \$6MM in interest rate payments since 2015 because of the AAA rating. The rating provides us with ‘unfettered market access.’

Town Administrator Tom Mayo discussed the importance of our rating for the development community. The developer gets better interest rates if the community is AAA.

Chair Strehle asked if there are any projects which we are NOT pursuing in order to maintain our AAA rating. Mr. Mayo replied no. Mr. Anderson asked by how much are we

clearing the threshold for AAA. Mr. Tortora said by a lot. The town has good policies and procedures and good fund balances – which is a soft spot in most jurisdictions.

Mr. Mayo discussed 2008/2009 - when we were given a downgrade. He said we had comparable wealth, but bad decision making. Mr. Tortora said there was concern when there is a draw down on the reserves. One of the key things they are looking for is the amount of reserves.

Conversation ensued regarding the current Financial Policy and what is the appropriate Fund Balance percentage as well as the TAE calculation.

#### **4. Update from the Hingham Affordable Housing Trust**

Ms. Cooper provided an update. Amy Farrell is the new Chair of the Trust. Trust member Kathleen Amante presented an overview of the Hingham Housing Plan.

1,005 units (11.37%) of 8,841 year-round housing units qualify as affordable housing in Hingham. Only 349 qualify as affordable when market value units in 40B projects are removed. This represents 3.95%.

Ms. Farrell said we have met the Safe Harbor threshold. The target is 250 more units by 2031, assisted by the Housing Trust. Four developments are underway.

#### **5. Financial Policy Update Discussion**

Vice Chair Danis presented the proposed changes to the Financial Policy. AdCom members all agreed the AAA bond rating is important. There was discussion on the appropriate percentage to use for cost increases in budgeting. There was discussion regarding inserting Climate Change language. Ms. Kirk felt the language is too specific for a broad financial policy statement and wonders if it should be in the general section in the beginning of the document instead of the Capital Outlay section. Overall, the members supported the language tied to Capital Outlay because of the recent vote at Town Meeting regarding Net Zero and the importance the Town has put on climate initiatives.

#### **6. Review and Approval of Minutes from September 14 and October 2, 2021**

The committee voted on and approved the Meeting minutes of September 14<sup>th</sup> (Roll Call Vote: 12-0) and October 2<sup>nd</sup> (Roll Call Vote: 5-0-7).

#### **7. Liaison Reports**

##### **a. Sustainable Budget Task Force**

Vice Chair Danis gave a brief overview. The Task Force will be presenting to the Select Board on October 19<sup>th</sup>.

##### **b. ACES/Education/Foster School Building Committee**

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Mr. Anderson had nothing to report for ACES. Chair Strehle has appointed Mr. Sheehan and Mr. MacDonald as liaisons to Foster School Building Committee

**c. Hingham Development & Industrial Commission (HDIC)**

Ms. Cooper said there has been a lot of discussion regarding water and The Wastewater Infrastructure Report by the South Shore Chamber of Commerce. The report is focused on Route 3/Route 53 corridor for development.

**d. Harbor Development Committee (HDC)**

Mr. Sheehan said the existing efforts are around the Town Pier. They are working on an RFP to raise the Town Pier. They are working through issues with the Conservation Commission.

**e. Community Preservation Committee (CPC)**

Ms. MacDonald reported that the Final Applications were due today (October 12). Nine applications had come in by the time of the AdCom meeting.

**f. Public Safety Facility**

Ms. MacDonald said the PSF Committee is close to finalizing the schematic design; the current iteration is 48,920SF (vs original 56,525). The committee continues to focus on energy efficiency and sustainability standards. They are currently anticipating an article in the Warrant for construction documents and a Special Town Meeting later in 2022 for construction funding. They estimate 18 months of construction.

**g. Hingham Municipal Light Board**

Ms. Black said they held their first public meeting to present a new substation proposal. The proposed site is at the DPW. There will be three public meetings. They are expecting two Warrant articles – one to transfer land from the DPW to the Light Board and one to fund the development of the site.

**h. Climate Action Planning Committee (CAPC)**

Ms. Black reported that the committee has begun meeting. They are looking for a consultant to do a carbon inventory. The inventory will drive what kind of planning needs to be done.

**8. Discussion of Advisory Committee Housekeeping Items**

Chair Strehle indicated that the next meeting will be November 16<sup>th</sup>.

**9. Matters not anticipated within 48 hours of meeting**

There were none.

**10. Adjourn**

- Adjourn - 10:08
- Roll Call Vote 12-0

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**Documents Distributed for this Meeting**

- Agenda
- Financial Policy – Redline
- Hingham Housing Plan Slide Show for Planning Board
- HAHT 10\_12\_21 FINAL

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy MacDonald  
Advisory Committee Secretary