

## Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Meeting Date - February 17, 2022

Remote Meeting via Zoom

**In Attendance:** J. Strehle, G. Danis, N. MacDonald, B. Black, D. Cooper, R. Curley, K. Dziergowski, M. Goulet, C. Kirk, A. Macdonald, A. McElaney, S. Melia, E. Sheehan, T. Sherwood, Town Accountant S. Nickerson.

**Absent:** D. Anderson

### 1. Call Meeting to Order

At 7:02pm Chair Strehle 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 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.”

### 2. Comments from the Public Regarding Items Not on the Agenda

None

### 3. Reserve Fund Transfer Request Related to Straits Pond

Conservation Officer Emily Sullivan gave an overview of the request. She noted that Straits Pond is part of the Weir River Estuary and borders Hingham, Hull, and Cohasset, located near Victoria's Sub Shop. In 2007 the Straights Pond Technical Advisory Committee was formed with representatives from all three towns as well as several State and Federal agencies. Ms. Sullivan explained that in 2007 the manual tidal gate was upgraded to an automated tidal gate and that historically funding has been provided on an as-needed basis to cover the Technical Advisory Committee's accrued expenses; Hingham contributes 25%, Hull 50%, and Cohasset 25%. In 2007 Hingham contributed \$5000 for operational expenses and an upgrade of the gate's sensors. Ms. Sullivan explained that this past year, the gate failed; repairs were made, and a sediment survey was completed as the sediment is causing the issues with the gate. This year, the contribution requested is unexpectedly high at \$21,148 and Ms. Sullivan noted that the Conservation Commission does not have this in their budget. Ms. Black asked how the division of costs was decided; Ms. Sullivan believes it was decided when the Technical Advisory Committee was formed. Ms. Black inquired about the purpose of the tidal gate; Ms. Sullivan described that the gate is used to help with the flushing of the pond; it opens and closes with the tide and helps maintain a healthy eco system. She explained that there is now runoff sedimentation that is impeding the functioning of the gate. Chair Strehle asked about the Select Board hearing; Ms. Sullivan said the Select Board voted unanimously in favor of the fund transfer. The request was approved by AdCom by roll call vote 12-0. Treasurer Sue Nickerson will transfer the funds next week.

### 4. Warrant Article Hearings and Potential Votes

#### **Article EE: Foster School Funds for Pre-Construction Costs**

School Building Committee Chair Linda Hill gave an overview of the Article. She noted that the Building Committee presented the schematic designs to the MSBA last week and received their preliminary approval to continue with the project; the Building

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Committee will go before the full MSBA board in the fall for final approval. She explained that the intent of this Article is to receive interim funding to get the Building Committee through the fall and the anticipated Special Town Meeting where it is anticipated that full funding for the Foster project will be requested. She noted that the interim funding will enable them to stay on their strict schedule, enabling a fall 2024 opening of the building. School Building Committee member Ray Estes gave an overview of the project. He noted that they have finished the feasibility phase, determined that the site is buildable, and considered 10 different options. The Committee will be working through the schematic design over the next two months. He anticipates that the schematic design will be submitted to Cost Estimators by end of March. He reiterated that the funding request of this Article is to allow the committee to continue working from April through October; he noted that because of the MSBA schedule they cannot get approval before August 31st. The additional work will give the Committee a more informed cost estimate to put before the Town at the anticipated fall ATM. The Committee is highly confident that they will get MSBA approval on August 31st. He noted that the funds will be used to cover OPM and Architect work through the end of October and that these funds will be folded into the appropriation requested at STM. Mr. Curley inquired about the source of funding and wondered why the Town is considering non excluded debt instead of excluded debt; he noted that historically the Town uses baans to cover construction documents and the debt is rolled into larger bonds borrowed with the construction costs. Mr. Estes defers to AdCom, the Select Board, and the Town Administration to determine how the financing is done. Ms. Nickerson noted that the Town Administrator has already made his recommendations on how to finance the Articles on the Warrant and as CEO of the Town it is ultimately his decision and that the Select Board decides what is a debt exclusion and what is put on the ballot. Mr. Macdonald asked why Option J (renovate current school) was not more seriously considered. Mr. Estes noted that Option J was a Code Upgrade Renovation which would not provide a school that meets the defined curriculum requirements and would not address fundamental problems with the existing school. Ms. Hill noted that two-thirds of the current building is in the existing flood plain. Mr. Danis asked about the Kleinfelder report and the 50-year flood plain. He noted the recent Boston Globe report that indicates that sea-level rising is happening substantially faster than originally estimated and asked if the committee should consider this. Mr. Estes noted that the Committee is considering all the studies that are available. Mr. Estes and Ms. Hill noted that the sea rise will affect the whole Crow Point and downtown areas and that this is something needs to be addressed Town wide. Ms. Hill noted that they may raise the site further; the current design is three feet above what the Kleinfelder Report recommended. Mr. Estes noted that this was also addressed by the MSBA, and they are comfortable with the current siting. Ms. Kirk asked if the \$3MM that is being requested is in addition to the \$105MM cost. Mr. Estes indicated it is included in the \$105MM, or whatever the ultimate number is. There was general conversation regarding how the project is and should be socialized in the Town. Ms. Hill says the Committee is talking about ways to engage the community. Ms. Black asked about the number of students supported with the current design. Mr. Estes said the school is being designed for 629 students, which is an average enrollment, not a peak; it will also support pre-k and SPED programs. Ms. MacDonald noted support for this project across the entire Town but that there will need to be education outreach done regarding the costs and how the costs support the educational requirements. Ms. Cooper believes the project is well supported by the Town, but the costs are concerning for non-parents; she reinforced the need to use the reserve fund to offset the tax burden in the first three years. There was general discussion regarding the Article's comment and suggested inclusions. Mr. McElaney asked if the Committee is looking at the design consequences

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on the operating budget; Mr. Estes indicated that the Committee is looking at operational costs as part of design conversations and provided the HVAC design as an example; they are looking at ways to accomplish net-zero and assessing total lifecycle costs as part of the analysis. Ms. Hill believes there might be grant money to offset some of costs as well. Mr. Estes noted they are working with HMLP and that the building will be designed as solar ready. Ms. Kirk asked if the comment should also reflect that there no other parcels in Town that meet the needs of the school; she also asked what the incremental cost is for being designed as a net-zero building. Ms. Hill said they have asked the cost estimators to provide that information. There was conversation regarding the language needed in the recommended motion. Mr. Estes noted that the MSBA will require evidence of local funding and will need to review the Recommended Motion.

### **Article Q: SSCC Pool**

Chair Strehle circulated an updated version of the Article and comment earlier in the day. Mr. Curley suggested using available funds for a shovel ready project that can be delivered in 2025; he noted that additional funds will go into the fund balance between now and the time the Town borrows the construction funds for the two large building projects (Foster School and the Public Safety Facility); he noted that with the removal of the wharf project from the Warrant that the Pool Project will be the only borrowing article on the ballot. Ms. Strehle indicated that she has met with the Town Administrator, Bond Counsel, and Sue Nickerson about options for funding this project and does not believe that the Town Administrator is going to change his decision. Ms. Cooper believes we should use the available funds to reduce the tax burden as always discussed. Ms. Strehle added that bond counsel noted that the cost should be spread out over both current and future users of the pool. Ms. Sherwood, Mr. McElaney, and Mr. Sheehan expressed support for Mr. Curley's comments. Mr. Danis believes the money the Town has been saving for years for designated purposes should not be redirected to other projects. Ms. Kirk asked if the bubble would be subject to a future Town vote; Ms. Strehle noted that any operating costs for a year-round pool will require a Town Meeting vote to approve such a budget. Ms. Melia wants the comment to reflect a two-step process. Priya Howell (26 Del Prete) is concerned about having something on the budget that would be a drain on the school budget and wants clarification of how the year-round pool would be approved by the Town. Chris Jones (20 Del Prete) asks for clarity in the Warrant. The recommended motion was approved by roll call vote, 13-0

### **(Potential Vote) Article N: Community Preservation Committee**

No discussion as the vote was taken February 15, 2022.

## **5. Town Administrator Budget Priorities**

Town Administrator Tom Mayo presented his budget priorities as presented to the Select Board. His prioritized list by requestor:

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Priority	Department	Request	Amount
1	Elections	Additional poll pad & software	\$1,875
2	Fire	Paramedic school tuition	\$40,000
3	Select Board Office	Sustainability Coordinator	\$48,000
4	Public Works	Part-time Office Assistant (shared w/WRWS)	\$26,366
5	Select Board Office	Part-time Grant Writer	\$40,000
6	Recreation	Town-wide turf maintenance: spring/fall landscaping of fields, courts, and parking lots	\$27,600
7	Public Works	Assistant Town Engineer	\$85,000
8	Historic Preservation	Assess and prioritize historic markers/monuments	\$3,000
9	Human Resources	Expand quarterly employee training	\$2,000
10	Harbormaster	Remove/launch Town landing and boat ramp floats	\$3,000
11	Fire	4 additional firefighters	\$355,826
12	Police	3 additional officers	\$211,695
13	Police	Increase overtime	\$40,000
14	Health	200 flu shots	\$9,300
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$893,662</b>

Mr. Mayo indicated that he does not believe the Town should pursue an override this year; he believes there is a path to a balanced budget without one. Ms. Black noted her understanding that there will be State funding for the Sustainability Coordinator. Mr. Mayo indicated he believes that as well but that the position still needs to be budgeted. Mr. Curley asked if the additional budget requests are shown in the updated forecast and Mr. Mayo said they are. Mr. McElaney inquired as to why CPC funds are not being used for the turf maintenance. Mr. Mayo responded that as this is an annual cost it should be reflected in the Town's budget. Mr. McElaney asked if Greenbush Funds can be used by Historic Preservation for their assessment needs. Mr. Mayo said Greenbush Funds cannot be used as the markers being assessed are outside of the geography that the Greenbush funds cover. Ms. MacDonald questioned reserving almost \$600k in budget to hire additional police and fire officers when those departments are not currently fully staffed. Mr. Mayo said the fire department hopes that by not having to hire paramedics the pool of eligible candidates increases. Ms. Cooper offered that the upgraded salaries proposed in the budgets should also make for easier hiring. Ms. MacDonald asked about using funds from school athletic funds to pay for field maintenance. Ms. Melia commented that the funds are also for fields that are not school property. Mr. Mayo will investigate with school administration. Mr. Curley initiated a discussion of funding sources and asked if it would be useful in the future for the AdCom to have a dialog about funding sources before final determinations are made. He noted that the tax impact of debt exclusion is minimal relative to the impact of an override. He also noted that the Town should be forecasting fund balance as it impacts borrowing decisions. Mr. Mayo noted that the fund balance grew more than anticipated because of the delay in the MSBA approval of the Foster project. He believes the Town is using these funds correctly with the recommendations as presented. He noted that it is a complex process that includes input from a lot of experts including Capital Market Advisors, Bond Counsel, Town Counsel, the Select Board, and the Town Administration. Ms. MacDonald expressed frustration in the underfunding of medium sized capital projects and noted that the Town does large projects well but needs a better path for smaller projects. Ms. Cooper supports the recommendations as put forward. Ms. Melia believes it is possible to support both schools and other projects. Mr. McElaney noted the money allocated for tax relief will remain

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in the fund balance account for some time before it is spent. Ms. Nickerson noted that interest rates are rising, and that the Town might change its traditional borrowing practices; the Town might choose to go straight to long term bonds and not do short term borrowing.

### 6. Warrant Process Update

Chair Strehle gave an update on the Warrant Article process. She noted that two articles being withdrawn; the Harbor Wharf Walls (there were permitting issues with the State causing the project to be put on hold for 12-18 months); and 32 Rockwood Road (the land failed a perc test so there is nothing that can be done with the piece of land; it will not be transferred from the Town to the HAHT). She reported that the Select Board is considering opening the Warrant for two new articles: Article GG - Real Estate Transfer Fee; and Article HH - Reallocate Borrowed but Unspent Fund for Capital Projects. It is anticipated that the funds referenced in the second Article will be redirected to the PRS windows project.

### 7. Discussion of Advisory Committee Housekeeping Items

Chair Strehle discussed the upcoming schedule.

- AdCom is not meeting the week of February 21<sup>st</sup> (school vacation week)
- March 1st – AdCom will meet jointly with Select Board and School Committee to hear an updated forecast presentation from the Town Administrator. Additionally, AdCom will hear Articles CC, G, HH
- March 3rd – AdCom will hear the School Budget

Mr. Curley asked if the date for Town Meeting has been finalized; Chair Strehle said the Town is still waiting for approval from the State Legislature to move the Town election; this is necessary to accommodate an outdoor Town meeting on Saturday April 30th.

### 8. Matters not anticipated within 48 hours of meeting

None

### 9. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by roll call vote, 12-0

## Documents Distributed for this Meeting

- Agenda
- Unassigned Fund Balance to offset Debt Service
- Reserve Fund Transfer Request (Conservation)
- Straits Pond Memo 02152022
- Draft Warrant Articles Q, EE
- WASS

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy MacDonald  
Advisory Committee Secretary

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