

# Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

**Date: February 23, 2021**

**Place: Remote Meeting via Zoom**

**In attendance:** Committee Members Bob Curley, Julie Strehle, Andy McElaney, Evan Sheehan, Dave Anderson, Davalene Cooper, Kristin Dziergowski, Victor Baltera, Tina Sherwood, Libby Claypoole, Alan Macdonald, Brenda Black, Eryn Kelley, Nancy MacDonald, George Danis and Town Accountant Sue Nickerson.

**Absent:** No one

**Call meeting to order:** The AdCom joined the Board of Selectmen (BOS) and the School Committee (SC) for a discussion of an updated Town Financial Forecast and a presentation by the School Administration of the proposed FY 22 School Budget. BOS Chair Mary Power called the BOS meeting to order at 7:00 pm 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.”

Chair Curley called the AdCom to order at 7:08 pm and adopted the statement read by BOS Chair Power. School Committee Chair Kerry Ni called the School Committee to order at 7:09 pm and also adopted the statement read by Chair Power.

## **1. Discussion of the updated FY 22 forecast and presentation of the FY 22 School budget:**

- Town Administrator Tom Mayo presented the updated FY 22 forecast which has the following summarized totals:

Category	Feb. 22 forecast	Feb. 5 forecast	\$ change
Revenue	\$133,021,848	\$129,894,970	\$3,126,878
Expense	\$137,572,378	\$136,934,656	\$637,722
Total	(\$4,550,530)	(\$7,039,686)	(\$2,489,156)

Mr. Mayo noted that this new forecast reduces the projected deficit from \$7.0 million to \$4.6 million. The reduction is due to increased receipts from New Growth of \$150,000, the addition of \$600,000 in meals tax to Debt Exclusions, and the possible use of \$2,367,817 from Fund Balance. There were increases in Article 6 expenses and Capital Outlay spending.

BOS Chair Power asked about the potential for further changes in the forecast and Mr. Mayo stated that there could be changes to Health Care expense (part of Article 6) and the Overlay accounts but that he does not expect those changes to be more than several hundred thousand dollars at the most.

AdCom member Libby Claypoole asked about the increase in Capital spending and Mr. Mayo stated that this was an attempt to begin to address some long term structural issues with Capital spending. AdCom member Victor Baltera questioned the projected deficits from FY 23-26 given that spending was projected to rise only 2%. Mr. Mayo noted that the forecast was a revenue forecast and acknowledged the 2% used for annual spending increases is well under the historical rate of spending, particularly for schools.

- School Superintendent Dr. Paul Austin next presented the proposed FY 22 school budget. Dr. Austin used a Power Point slide presentation which can be viewed on the School Committee web site.

The budget proposal put forth by Dr. Austin, and subsequently affirmed by the School Committee, includes a “level services” base budget and a “recovery” budget which seeks additional funding needed to assist our students in recovering the academic and social/emotional losses due to the pandemic as measured by comparing current testing scores and grades against historic norms. Staff additions included in the recovery budget would also seek to address historic achievement gaps in test scores among (1) all students, (2) students with disabilities, and (3) students with high needs. The proposed FY 22 School budget is as follows:

FY 21 approved budget	\$56,730,985	
FY 22 level services increase	\$2,529,166	4.5%
FY 22 revenue loss due to COVID-19	\$545,437	0.9%
FY 22 level services budget	\$59,796,588	5.4%
FY 22 additional recovery spending	\$2,486,228	4.4%
FY 22 proposed total school budget	\$62,282,816	9.8%

The proposed budget includes an additional 32 FTE’s plus 2 contract positions. The additional positions are in both regular and special education and are necessary to address the academic and social/emotional issues

quantified in the testing. Dr. Austin stressed that the recovery budget would be a multi-year one since it is not possible to determine the amount of time it will take students to return to the academic and social/emotional norms that existed prior to COVID-19.

Dr. Austin presented additional information on school enrollment, class size, student/teacher ratio, and various metrics on per pupil spending for Hingham and its benchmark communities as compiled by the State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

Dr. Austin concluded his presentation by stating that the proposed budget does not address all of the needs of the District but that it does include funds for a five-year masterplan to assess the current status of school space, resources, facilities, and the projected needs going forward.

Following his presentation, Dr. Austin took questions from the BOS, AdCom and public. Questions were raised about the impact of remote learning on test scores, plans for summer school, the budget impact if enrollment is below projections, the use of tents for outdoor learning, the use of contract versus permanent positions (with possible CARES ACT reimbursement) and the impact on Town finances from the current rate of the annual increase in the school budget in light of a projected decrease in the rate of growth of Town revenue.

Dr. Austin noted that the impact from remote learning would be better determined once full time classes resumed for grades 2-5 (K-1 is full time) on March 15<sup>th</sup>. He also stated that plans were underway for a summer program (possible State funding) and that the use of tents was being considered. He conceded that enrollment changes could affect the budget but that it was too soon to estimate those changes. He also noted that union contracts prevent the use of contract personnel in teaching positions.

In response to the question on the rate of growth of the School budget Dr. Austin noted that the current budget breakdown is 84% personnel costs, 13% contracts and 3% all other. Personnel costs increase at 3.6% annually due to step and salary increases. BOS Chair Power noted that this growth would (absent an increase in new development or revenue) necessitate a regular series of overrides and wondered how this would impact Town residents, particularly those on fixed or limited income. AdCom Chair Curley noted that the role of the AdCom is to provide an independent view and thereby help to protect Town residents by providing an independent view.

## **2. Warrant Article hearings at the joint meeting:**

- a. Article T – Five-Year School bus lease: This Article allows the School Administration to enter into a 5-year lease program for school buses. School Business Manager John Ferris stated that the current 5-year lease program, authorized in 2016, has been very successful. The BOS voted 3-0 in favor of the Article;
- b. Article U – Plymouth River School Windows Authorization to Borrow: This Article seeks to fund the replacement of windows, doors and related infrastructure at Plymouth River School. The Town has been accepted into the Massachusetts School Building Authority’s (MSBA) Accelerated Repair Grant Program which will provide approximately \$1.3 million for the project. The Town has set aside \$1.0 million and the balance needed to complete the project is estimated at \$1.9. While the BOS voiced support of the project it deferred voting until more accurate information on the cost is available;
- c. Article V – 2017 School Building Committee Additional Charge: This Article will allow the 2017 School Building Committee to oversee the window, door, and related infrastructure project at Plymouth River School. The BOS voted 3-0 in favor of the Article.

**3. The AdCom then recessed from the joint meeting at 9:56 pm and reconvened at 10:00 pm.**

**4. Comments from the public not on the agenda:** None

**6. Further discussion and potential vote on Article M- Community Preservation Committee (item taken out of agenda order):**

Vice Chair Julie Strehle started this discussion by stating her unease with the proposed grant for a bathroom at Bare Cove Park. Her concern stems from the CPC presentation to the joint BOS/AdCom meeting where the proponents seemed uncertain about the type of facility (method of waste disposal: flush with vault storage or dry composting), the cost of ongoing maintenance, and the responsibility for cleaning the bathroom. Additional AdCom members discussed the cost of renting a portable bathroom (\$300/year) versus the \$67,800 in the CPC grant proposal and the need for a bathroom facility in Bare Cove park given the existing bathrooms at Lynch Field (which are supposed to be open on weekends for Park visitors) and the Fire Museum.

The AdCom voted 14-0-0 in favor of Article-M but decided to place a hold on a vote on the grant for the Bare Cove Park bathroom to March 2<sup>nd</sup> to hear an update from the Bare Cove Park Committee on the questions raised.

**5. (Agenda item) Warrant Article Votes and any further discussion:**

- a. Article A- Hannah Lincoln Whiting Fund: The AdCom voted 14-0-0 in favor of this Article;

- b. Article B- Assume Liability for DCR on Rivers, Harbors, etc.: The AdCom voted 14-0-0 in favor of this Article;
- c. Article C- Reports of Various Town Committees: The Reports of Committees listed in this Article are those that have been explicitly created by Town Meeting. The AdCom voted 14-0-0 in favor of this Article;
- d. Article G- Transfer from Stabilization Fund: The AdCom voted 14-0-0 in favor of this Article; The AdCom voted 14-0-0 in favor of this Article;
- e. Article H- Disbursement of Electric Light Department Receipts: The AdCom voted 14-0-0 in favor of this Article;
- f. Article L-Acceptance of Easements: The AdCom voted 14-0-0 in favor of this Article.

**7. *Review and approval of Minutes from Meetings of February 9 and 11***

- a. Minutes of February 9<sup>th</sup> approved with revisions by roll call vote of 14-0-0;
- b. Minutes of February 11<sup>th</sup> approved with revisions by roll call vote of 13-0-1 (Evan Sheehan abstained).

**8. *Warrant Articles Update:*** Chair Curley noted that the Harbor Wharves Article (Article Z) was under review by the proponents due to comments made by the Conservation Committee; that the Gender Neutral Language Article (Article Q) was being reviewed to further understand the nature and magnitude of the required changes; and that Article BB requiring the reading of the names of past year deceased Town volunteers at the Annual Town Meeting was still being reviewed by the Attorney General's office.

**9. *Liaison Reports:*** Libby Claypoole noted that the Capital Outlay Committee had voted a \$2.6 million budget and would now have to consider additional spending of \$500 thousand based on the recent forecast. Ms. Claypoole added that the Committee had already prioritized a list of deletions and additions in anticipation of changes in the budget.

**10. *Discussion of Advisory committee housekeeping items:*** Chair Curley updated the AdCom on the following items:

- The AdCom would next meet February 25<sup>th</sup> and then on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. He was uncertain about a March 4<sup>th</sup> meeting;
- There has been some consideration given to having the Annual Town Meeting on May 15 with a rain date of the 16<sup>th</sup> and a possible override vote on June 26<sup>th</sup>;
- Due to staff turnover at the Planning Board (PB) the AdCom's hearing of any proposed PB Articles has been delayed;
- The Capital Outlay budget hearing may occur on March 2<sup>nd</sup>.

11. ***Matters not anticipated within 48 hours of meeting:*** None

12. ***Adjourn: Motion to adjourn at 10:24 pm by roll call vote of 14-0-0***

Respectfully submitted,

George Danis, Secretary

List of Documents Distributed for this Meeting:

- Agenda
- Warrant Articles
- School Budget
- Forecast
- Meeting Minutes from February 9 and 11, 2021

Approved on March 2, 2021 by roll call vote of 14-0-0.