

Select Board

March 1, 2022

Present:

- Select Board: Mr. Joseph Fisher (Chair) and Ms. Liz Klein, and Mr. Bill Ramsey
- Mr. Tom Mayo, Town Administrator
- Ms. Michelle Monsegur, Assistant Town Administrator for Finance
- Mr. Art Robert, Assistant Town Administrator for Operations

6:01 PM: Call to order

Mr. Fisher 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 the Town of Hingham in accordance with the Open Meeting Law may record this meeting and all communications during this meeting. 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. “

Mr. Fisher asked if any participants were recording the meeting. No one indicated they were recording.

Select Board members participating in the meeting were himself, Mr. Bill Ramsey and Ms. Liz Klein

Approval of Minutes

Vote: Mr. Ramsey made a motion to approve the minutes dated February 17, 2022. Ms. Klein seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Klein: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Special (One-Day) license - Change of date: Friends of Hingham Cemetery

The date was changed due to a Covid surge earlier in the year and they would like to set a new date now. Police Chief Jones did not have any concerns with this change.

Vote: Ms. Klein made a motion to amend the vote regarding the issuance of a Special (One-Day) Wine and Malt Beverages license to John Davenport on behalf of the Friends of Hingham Cemetery, Inc., for the 2022 Winter Arts Series to be held at Ames Chapel by changing the date of the January 8, 2022 event to April 23, 2022 at 7:30 pm. Mr. Ramsey seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Klein: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

6:10 PM: Ms. Chrissy Roberts, Chair of the Board of Assessors, called to order the meeting of the Board of Assessors. Also present were Mr. Joshua Ross and Mr. Al Chambers.

Agreement with Vision Government Solutions, Inc.

Ms. Erin Walsh, Town of Hingham Assessor, explained that she intends to enter into a contract with Vision Government Solutions to conduct their FY23 Real Property Reassessment Program, which they undertake every five years, as required by the Department of Revenue. The reassessed value of properties is based on market sales. Values of certain areas of Town could increase or decrease due to a reflection of sales. Ms. Walsh expected the work to be complete by September 2023. Some FY22 funds would be used to fund work done during FY22 and the balance would be paid from FY23 funds. Since they conducted a 50% review during their last reassessment program, they plan to conduct a review of the other 50% of properties during this upcoming reassessment. Members of the Board commended the staff of the Assessor's Office for their work on this contract.

Vote: Mr. Ramsey made a motion to authorize the Town Administrator to sign the agreement with Vision Government Solutions, Inc. to conduct the FY23 Real Property Reassessment Program for the Town of Hingham in an amount not to exceed \$72,400. Ms. Klein seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Klein: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

6:17 PM: Ms. Roberts adjourned the meeting of the Board of Assessors.

2022 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles

Article AAA: Amend Zoning By-law: Gender Neutral and other Term Revisions

Ms. Emily Wentworth, Director of Planning, explained that this Article would propose to change wording in the Zoning By-Laws to reflect gender-neutral terminology similar to changes previously made to the General Town of Hingham By Laws. In addition, she reported that the Planning Board proposed to exchange the term "grandfathered" with the word "pre-existing," due to the term's racist origins. She reported that the Planning Board held a public hearing on January 3, 2022, where they unanimously voted to advance this Article. Mr. Fisher noted that the Select Board would not take any votes because this is a Planning Board Article.

Article GG: Real Estate Transfer Fee (version 1)

Mr. Mayo explained that Article GG relates to a new revenue source for the Town as proposed by the Sustainable Budget Task Force. He noted that Article GG would exempt all affordable housing and many lower income homes. Based on some data from the Assessor's Office, the first \$560,000+/-, or approximately 80% of the median assessed home value, would be exempt from the fee. A 1% fee would be imposed on homebuyers above the exempt amount. The Sustainable Budget Task Force expected revenue of approximately \$2.2 million from the proposed Article. Ms. Klein noted that the median home price would be recalculated every year, so the number would be fluid. Town Counsel, John Coughlin, explained that this fee would only apply to home purchases and not to homes acquired

through an inheritance or mortgage transfer, such as a reverse mortgage. Mr. Ramsey and Ms. Klein felt it was important to continue to maintain affordability in Town and felt that this revenue should be applied to Capital Projects. Ms. Walsh said that the Assessor's Office would certify the median assessed home value by March 15 each year and would then submit it to the Select Board. The Select Board would then certify what 80% of that number would be during a public meeting prior to April 15. Mr. Mayo proposed two versions of the Warrant Article and the Board discussed. Mr. Ramsey voiced his support for the Article and suggested that the fees collected could be used for Capital projects or for affordable housing. There was some additional discussion regarding the calculation of the median home price and what involvement the Assessor's Department would have in calculating this. There was some additional discussion regarding whether any other towns in Massachusetts have implemented a similar fee. While no towns on the South Shore currently have a similar fee, there are several Towns that have proposed similar fees though they have not yet been implemented. Mr. Fisher posed the question of whether there is a model that Hingham should be following that would enhance their chances of being successful in the State Legislature. Mr. Coughlin, Town Counsel, said that Hingham's Article is modeled on the pending Special Acts that have been filed with the MA General Court, but there is no existing law that has been signed and passed. Mr. Fisher noted that he has reviewed proposals that have been submitted to the legislature by Arlington, Somerville, and Brookline. Mr. Fisher concluded by saying that this is an alternative source of revenue that the Town should consider and could be a means of mitigating future tax increases. There was a consensus amongst the Board that funds received from this fee would be used for Capital needs and infrastructure. Mr. Fisher noted that the version of the Article the Board felt comfortable with would note that all fees received would be placed in a Stabilization Fund to be used for Capital projects and other purposes, such as certain environmental initiatives, as listed in M.G.L. c. 44, § 7. Assuming that this Article is approved by Town Meeting, it still would not take effect until approved by the State Legislature. To conclude, a summary of the Proposed Real Estate Transfer Fee is as follows:

Proposed Real Estate Transfer Fee



- **1% fee of purchase price**
- **Responsibility of buyer**
- **Exempt amount equal to 80% of median assessed value**
- **Pay fee and obtain certificate from Town to record deed**

EXAMPLE

Annual Valid Sales	Average Sale Price	Exemption Amount	Average Amount Subject to Fee	Fee Percent	Estimated Annual Revenue
475	\$1,044,831	\$562,880	\$481,951	0.01	\$2,289,266

Article GG: Real Estate Transfer Fee (version 2)

Vote: Ms. Klein made a motion to amend Warrant Article GG regarding a Real Estate Transfer Fee in the form attached hereto. Mr. Ramsey seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Klein: yes

Mr. Ramsey:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Vote: Mr. Ramsey made a motion to recommend favorable action of Article GG. Ms. Klein seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Ms. Klein: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Discussion of FY23 Funding Options

Mr. Mayo reported that the Town received some unfortunate news regarding its ability to follow its plan for funding this year's budget, specifically that the Department of Revenue plans to prohibit the use of \$2.1 million of Stabilization Fund Balance for the FY23 Budget. This would bring a more recent deficit calculation to \$3,725,369, which is inclusive of all additional budget requests. Mr. Mayo presented three options for creating a balance budget:

1. Reduce Services
2. Override (Select board authority needed)
3. Utilize excess Unassigned Fund Balance

Ms. Monsegur presented the Sustainable Budget Task Force rationale for an Override in FY 24, including:

- The COVID-19 pandemic continues
- Significant Federal funds remain available for FY23
- The Updated Financial Policy allows for the use of Unassigned Fund Balance under emergency circumstances to protect and stabilize Town resources and operations.
- Excess Unassigned Fund Balance is approximately \$12 million.
- The school strategic planning process and staffing audit are currently in progress.
- There have been significant leadership changes in Hingham Public Schools.
- There is inadequate time for the community to consider and assess the implications of an override.

Mr. Mayo presented the Prior Proposed Use of Unassigned Fund balance as follows:

- Unassigned Fund Balance in excess of 20% as of 6/31/2021 : \$12,083,036
 - Fire capital improvements (use in FY23) - \$2,230,000
 - Hingham High School Tennis Courts (use in FY23) - \$864,000
 - Proposed future offset Foster debt impact (use in FY 26-28) - \$4,700,000
 - Proposed future offset PDF debt impact (use in FY 26-28) - \$2,300,000
- Total proposed UFB planned for use: \$10,094,000
- Remaining: \$1,094,000

Ms. Monsegur noted that, while they have some idea of projected revenues, it is still too early to predict projected growth of Fund Balance as of June 31, 2022. She did, however show data on the 20-year history of Fund Balance, which showed a steady growth over the years. She added that the Town has done a lot of work in the years since the 2008 recession to build up their reserves. This plan has been proposed to make good use of reserves of Unassigned Fund Balance that have been built up over the past few years. Mr. Fisher was concerned with making sure that the Foster School project and the Public Safety Building project both move forward. He suggested that an override could minimize the tax impacts of both projects. He hoped that there would be new growth of Fund Balance that would help to offset the debt effects of the Foster School and Public Safety projects. Ms. Monsegur presented two scenarios regarding the projected use of Unassigned Fund Balance to offset debt service for large capital projects through 2032. Mr. Fisher suggested to hold off with an override for the upcoming Town Meeting. Ms. Klein noted that she would prefer not to ask residents for an override this year when the Town has \$12 million in Unassigned Fund Balance. Among other suggestions, Mr. Ramsey felt it would be important to consider the wide variety of incomes in Town as the Board moves forward with their decisions over the next 12 months. There was a consensus amongst the Board not to recommend an override for the upcoming Town Meeting.

COVID-19 Report

Mr. Mayo gave the following update on the COVID-19 pandemic:

“DPH is reporting that the 7-day average of confirmed COVID-19 cases has declined substantially, from to 1,720 on February 14, 2022 to 704 on February 27. Statewide hospitalizations have fallen, from 902 on February 13, 2022 to 445 on February 25. The latest data show the Hingham case count is declining. DPH reported a 14-day daily incidence rate of 54 cases in Hingham through February 10, 2022. On February 24, DPH reported a 14-day daily incidence rate of 27 cases in Hingham. It is important to note that many residents are now taking home-based testing which is most often not reported and therefore not in these statistics. As a result, we are assuming that the actual number of positive cases is higher than these statistics show. The overall vaccination rate for Hingham is now 84%. Further, 49 % of Hingham residents have received a booster dose. According to DPH, 79% of Hingham residents ages 5-11 are fully vaccinated.

The temporary COVID-19 regional testing site facility has been closed.

The Town of Hingham has received over 8,000 rapid antigen test kits from Plymouth County. The Town conducted two successful distribution days for Hingham residents, on Sunday, February 13 and Tuesday, February 15. We are reviewing other options for making remaining kits available to the community. On March 5, from 9a to 1p, HPS will conduct a pediatric vaccination clinic at Hingham Middle School. Vaccinations will be available for eligible Hingham students. The clinic will be run by the state and make available Pfizer and Moderna vaccine. **Pre-registration is required.** Tomorrow, HPS will provide clinic information and a link to parents – and post this information on their web site, <https://hinghamschools.org/>.

Effective September 7, 2021, I instituted a COVID-19 mask policy, acting under Chapter 263 of the Acts of 2016. Under this policy, all individuals age 5 and over, regardless of vaccination status, are REQUIRED to wear a mask covering the nose and mouth when indoors in non-school municipal facilities, with certain exceptions. On February 25, 2022 the federal Centers for Disease Control announced a new approach to COVID-19 prevention, based on community level. This color-coded approach escalates

prevention measures based on community level. Plymouth County is color coded green, reflecting the lowest COVID-19 level. At this level, key prevention steps include staying up-to-date with Covid-19 vaccines and getting tested if you have symptoms. Also on February 25, the CDC announced that, effective February 25, it is no longer required to wear masks on buses or vans operated by public or private school systems, including early care and education/child care programs. On February 28, the entire HPS school district implemented a "Mask Optional" policy, in its buildings and on its busses. On March 1, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) issued an updated Advisory Regarding Face Coverings. DPH now advises that a fully vaccinated person should wear a mask or face covering when indoors (and not in your own home) if you have a weakened immune system, or if you are at increased risk for severe disease because of your age or an underlying medical condition, or if someone in your household has a weakened immune system, is at increased risk for severe disease or is unvaccinated. I, alongside our Executive Health Officer and our COVID-19 Command Group, continue to evaluate COVID 19 data and trends. Consistent with discussions of this group, I am currently planning to lift the mask mandate on non-school municipal buildings on March 7.

Please continue to take precautions to protect yourself and others from COVID-19. As we all know, vaccination, wearing face coverings, practicing social distancing, and frequently washing hands, among other measures, help protect us all from COVID-19. On January 7, 2022, the Hingham Board of Health issued a Health Advisory strongly recommending the use of face coverings by all patrons, visitors, and employees within any indoor space open to the public in Hingham. The Health Advisory is directed to all visitors and employees within any indoor space in all public places, public housing, assisted living facilities, membership associations, and workplaces in Hingham. The [CDC](#) and the [Massachusetts DPH](#) guidance on face coverings can be found on their respective websites. The Board of Health recommends the use of an N-95, KN-95, or a (non-woven, multi-ply) surgical mask. Woven cloth masks, gators, and bandanas provide significantly less protection against this airborne respiratory virus. Also remember that any face covering should be fitted closely to one's skin to prevent unwanted gaps and leaks."

Mr. Fisher clarified that the lifting of the municipal mask mandate on March 7, 2022 would also apply to the Hingham Public Library.

Public Comment

"The Hingham Select Board encourages community engagement and welcomes questions and comments as agenda items are discussed at the meeting. In addition, we have set aside up to fifteen minutes for public comment for items that fall under the purview of the Select Board and are not already on tonight's agenda. If any guests wish to speak, please seek to be recognized. Once recognized, state your name and address and address your comments to the Chair. Comments will be limited to three minutes per speaker and must relate to topics within the scope of the responsibilities of the Select Board. Speakers are encouraged to present their remarks in a respectful manner and not to indulge in personalities. The Public Comment period is not a time for debate by members of the Select Board. The Select Board is not adopting or endorsing any of the comments made during the Public Comment period."

There were no comments from the public.

Town Administrator/Select Board Reports

Mr. Mayo reported that, in light of the developments between Russia and Ukraine, Hingham's municipal government has been evaluating our vulnerabilities and any places where the Town can improve our preparedness. He added that he has been having conversations with staff to help keep the Town's resources, such as Hingham's water, sewer and electrical plants as well as cyber security, as safe as possible.

Ms. Klein announced that the Rec Summer Program registration would open on March 2, 2022.

Vote: Mr. Ramsey made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Klein seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Ramsey: yes

Ms. Klein: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

The meeting adjourned at 7:38 PM.

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