

Board of Selectmen

March 31, 2019

Remote meeting via telephone conference call

Present:

- Board of Selectmen: Ms. Karen Johnson, Ms. Mary Power and Mr. Joseph Fisher
- Mr. Tom Mayo, Town Administrator
- Ms. Michelle Monsegur, Assistant Town Administrator
- Town Counsel, Mr. John Coughlin

Call to order: 7pm

Ms. Johnson called the meeting to order and read the following statement:

“This meeting is being held remotely by telephone as an alternate means of access pursuant to the 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 telephone communications during this meeting may be recorded by the Town of Hingham and is being recorded by the Town of Hingham in accordance with the Open Meeting Law.”

Approval of Minutes

Mr. Fisher made a motion to approve the minutes dated March 24, 2020. Ms. Power seconded.

Roll call Vote:

Mr. Fisher-yes

Ms. Power-yes

Ms. Johnson-yes

COVID-19 Update

Mr. Mayo read the following message regarding the Covi-19 crisis in Hingham:

“Last week, Governor Baker issued an emergency order extending the closure of all public and private schools and all non-emergency childcare programs in Massachusetts until May 4, 2020 in an effort to prevent the further spread of COVID-19. As you know, the Town suspended all non-essential municipal services and shifted staff to remote work to the extent possible on March 13, 2020. We are now planning to operate in this state until at least May 4, 2020, in line with Governor Baker’s most recent decision. Michelle will provide an update on Town services shortly.

All of our actions and decisions are guided by the need to keep our citizens and our employees safe and healthy. The Town’s COVID-19 response is being led by our Emergency Management Team, which meets seven days a week via videoconference. We are in the process of implementing a more robust Incident Command System that will pull staff in from other departments to augment our local COVID-19 response. Our Health Department team has been on the forefront of this pandemic, and standing up the ICS structure will greatly support and enhance their efforts.

The state has promoted a number of new resources to help connect residents with health care resources if they display COVID-19 symptoms. These resources include:

- The Buoy online tool, which helps MA residents get advice from an online health assistant safely at home, for free.
- The new messaging tool called “AlertsMA,” which allows residents to subscribe to real-time text notifications about coronavirus by texting the keyword COVIDMA to 888-777.
- And the 211 Information and Referral Hotline, where residents can make free and confidential calls to ask COVID-19 questions by dialing 211.

We posted a message on the Town website yesterday with links to more information about each of those resources.

According to the MA Department of Public Health (DPH), as of today, there were 6,620 laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19 across Massachusetts, including 459 in Plymouth County. DPH has recommended that local health departments report positive case numbers by county to protect the privacy and confidentiality of individuals who test positive for COVID-19. The numbers reported by the state only include laboratory-confirmed cases – they do not include clinical diagnoses of COVID-19 by medical professionals or people who self-diagnose and stay at home. Thus, the number of actual cases is much higher than what is reported through the state system. We do not collect our own data at the local level. We have included a link to the DPH current case count on the Town website and will continue to use their figures. It is important to remember that viruses do not respect town boundaries. In today’s hyper-connected world, social distancing is absolutely essential – every choice you make could save a life or put one at risk. It is crucial that we all stay home as much as possible and practice social distancing to prevent the further spread of COVID-19 in our community.

Everyone should continue to take every day preventative actions and precautions including:

- Maintain social distancing (stay 6ft away from other people)
- No gatherings of over 10 people
- Grocery stores, food pantries, banks, and pharmacies may have over 10 people but you also be maintaining social distancing
- Clean your hands often by using soap and water for at least 20 seconds
- If soap and water are not available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol
- To the extent possible, avoid touching high-touch surfaces in public places – elevator buttons, door handles, handrails, handshaking with people, etc.
- Avoid touching your face, nose, eyes, etc.
- Practice routine cleaning of frequently touched surfaces (for example: tables, doorknobs, light switches, handles, desks, toilets, faucets, sinks & cell phones
- As always, call your primary care provider directly if you are experiencing symptoms such as fever, cough, and shortness of breath”

Town Services Update

Ms. Monsegur gave the following update on the Town’s response to the Covid-19 outbreak: She said that the Town is doing its best to keep municipal services running while keeping employees and residents safe. The Health Department is working around the clock to monitor potential and confirmed Covid-19 cases, communicate with the Department of Public Health and the Centers for Disease Control, answer questions from residents, reach out to businesses and food establishments and advise municipal and school officials. Hingham school nurses have been supporting the Health Department team in

responding to this crisis. School Food Services staff have partnered with our Veterans Services Department to make sure that meals are still reaching disabled veterans and other vulnerable citizens in our community. Our Police, Fire and Public Works teams and our 911 Dispatchers continue to provide the vital services to the community that they always do. The Transfer Station remains open as usual and Public Works crews are still maintaining the public infrastructure around Town. Although the Senior Center is closed right now, its staff is still coordinating “Meals on Wheels” and facilitating rides to dialysis appointments and reaching out to seniors around Town to make sure they have everything that they need. The Director of Elder Services is initiating phone call messages to seniors in Town to make them aware of different resources at this time. The Senior Center and the Recreation Department are working on ways to implement remote and online classes for some of their more popular programs. In addition, the Building Department is processing permits online and is conducting inspections on unoccupied buildings. Similarly, the Assessors staff is conducting drive-by inspections of buildings and added that the departments are all trying to keep things going as best they can. The Hingham Public School Department is rolling out a remote learning plan in the next few days that will take effect on Monday, April 4th and will run for the extent of the closures. Public meetings have been taking place via conference call in order to keep Town business moving forward. The Town’s website has a page where local businesses can advertise their services and resources that are available for the public at this time. Contact information for all departments is on the Town’s COVID-19 webpage. Ms. Monsegur concluded that the Town employees are working hard behind the scenes and are available by phone or email if anyone needs assistance.

Mr. Mayo highlighted the fact that the Hingham Public Schools will be announcing the details of their remote learning plan in the next few days and that the plan will commence on Monday, April 4th and will run until the end of the school closures.

Ms. Johnson then gave the public some direction as to the format of the meeting. She advised that the Board would address the topics of the meeting and would, after each topic is discussed, open the meeting to comments and questions from the public. She also added that it has been posted on the agenda that if members of the public would like to make a comment at a meeting, it would be helpful to let the Board of Selectmen’s Office know ahead of time on which item they would like to comment. She added that this would help keep their remote meetings organized. She asked members of the public to please state their name and address when commenting during a meeting.

Mr. Fisher clarified for the public that the Town’s website address is www.hingham-ma.gov. He also asked how phone calls to the Town’s departments are currently being handled. Mr. Mayo advised the public that the COVID-19 page on the Town’s website has contact information for Town departments and he said that staff are checking phone messages daily and will get back to anyone who leaves a message. Mr. Fisher also clarified that the Transfer station is currently open during its regular hours.

Ms. Power asked if the swap shop at the Transfer Station was still closed and Mr. Mayo said that it does continue to be closed until further notice. She and Mr. Mayo also advised the public that his COVID-19 update would be available on the Town’s website. Ms. Power went on to say that she was very grateful for the dedicated support from the Town’s employees, as well as the cooperation between the Town and the School Department, especially regarding resources, nurses and food service. She wanted the

community to know that they are all working hard to ensure continuity of operations and also to take care of the citizens during this very difficult time.

Ms. Johnson said that she was impressed with the teamwork of the Town and the School Department as well as the extent to which the employees have helped out each other and she said that this extends to the people of the Hingham community which she is grateful to be a part of. She asked if there were any comments from the public and there were none.

Discussion and vote to postpone the Town of Hingham Annual Town Meeting under M.G.L. c. 39, § 9 and all other applicable laws

Ms. Johnson said that, given the Governor's orders, the Town of Hingham cannot gather for the current date of Town Meeting and said that Massachusetts General laws allows the Board of Selectmen to change the date of Town Meeting so long as the new date is not later than the end of the Town's fiscal year, which ends on June 30. She proposed a new date of June 22 for Town Meeting with a date of June 27 for the Town election. She said that, given the current situation, she was not sure if Town Meeting could be held on that date but she wanted to pick a date far enough in the future in the hope that it could be held then.

Mr. Fisher said that he agreed with Ms. Johnson and was in favor of the June 22 date for Town Meeting.

Ms. Power said that she agreed with the date the Chair announced. She also recognized that for the people who announced candidacy, this date would allow them the visibility that their candidacy deserves and she hoped that this new date would allow for maximum Town Meeting participation.

Mr. Mayo noted that Attorney Coughlin was on the line in case anyone had questions.

Mr. Fisher asked if holding Town Meeting on this date would be consistent with the Town's fiscal obligations and Mr. Mayo said that it was.

Dr. Dot Galo asked if there would be the typical Moderator's meeting the week before Town Meeting so that people could gather and hear the Warrant Articles and the public's comments on them. Ms. Johnson said that she hopes to but they will take into account the status of the COVID-19 situation at that time and they may need to alter typical meeting procedures (ex. alternate check-in procedures, social distancing, larger rooms, etc.). It was also discussed that a potential second night of Town Meeting would take place on the following day, June 23.

Lucy Hancock asked if the Warrant was set at this point and if it would be mailed at the typical time or would they would delay it because of the date change? Ms. Johnson said that the Warrant is set at this point and they plan on delaying the mailing because things are changing so quickly. Ms. Power added that the cover of the Warrant typically has the date and time of the meeting and serves as a public announcement and also felt that they should wait on printing and mailing it to the public. Ms. Johnson said that tonight they are voting based on the facts that they are aware of today with the hope of creating some certainty. Mr. Fisher asked if this new date would be posted on the town's website and the Chair said that it would.

Vote: Mr. Fisher made a motion to delay the Town of Hingham Annual Town Meeting from Monday April 27, 2020 at 7:00 PM until Monday June 22, 2020 at 7:00 PM pursuant to M.G.L. c. 39 § 9. Ms. Power seconded.

Roll call vote:

Ms. Power: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

Discussion and vote to postpone the Town of Hingham Election under Chapter 45 of the Acts of 2020 and all other applicable laws

Ms. Johnson explained that the Board of Selectmen had to wait until the legislature had acted, allowing them the ability to change the date of the election and pursuant to the Governor's declaration of emergency it allows them to change the date to June 27, 2020. She explained that, as specified in the Town of Hingham's by-laws, the election must be held the Saturday after Town Meeting. One of the concerns of holding the election on the original date of May 5th was the ability to print ballots and get them out to people because at that time they would not be able to hold voting in person. She acknowledged that this is a stressful time for the candidates and she felt that it was important for the Board of Selectmen to create some certainty for the candidates.

Mr. Fisher said that changing the date makes sense to him and asked when absentee ballots would be sent out and when early voting would commence. Mr. Coughlin said that the Town Clerk could start to print ballots at any time. Ms. Eileen McCracken, Town Clerk, said that she has waited for this evening's BOS meeting to have the ballots printed and she would now begin to do so. She also said that the Town is required to have a polling place open on the date of the election. Mr. Fisher asked when early voting could commence and Mr. John Coughlin said that the only thing that needed a vote was the date change so the Town could choose a date for early voting at any time now. Mr. Fisher mentioned that there are groups, such as the League of Women Voters, that like to meet to discuss the election and offer a forum for citizens to meet the candidates; he wanted to make sure that those groups would have enough time to do so. Ms. Johnson said that as soon as a date is chosen, it will be made public so that people and groups can plan. Mr. Fisher also asked if the people currently serving elected positions would remain in those positions until the date of the new election and Mr. Coughlin said that is what would happen. Ms. Johnson asked if there were any questions or comments from the public and there were none.

Vote: Ms. Power made a motion to postpone and reschedule the Town of Hingham Annual Election from Saturday May 2, 2020 from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM to Saturday June 27, 2020 from 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM pursuant to Chapter 45 of the Acts of 2020. Mr. Fisher seconded.

Roll call vote:

Ms. Power: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

Signing warrants under M.G.L. c. 41, § 56

Ms. Johnson explained that the Board of Selectmen review and sign all payroll accountings and bill payments for the Town Hall departments. She says that the Warrants cannot be processed without

signature of a member of the Board. She explained that Massachusetts General Law allows for one Selectman to sign those Warrants. She and Ms. Power both felt it made sense for the Chairman to do this. Ms. Johnson asked if there were any questions from the public regarding this and there were none.

Vote: Mr. Fisher made a motion to authorize Ms. Johnson to approval all bills, drafts, orders and payrolls on behalf of the Board of Selectmen pursuant to M.G.L. c. 41, § 56. Ms. Power seconded.

Roll call vote:

Ms. Power: yes

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

Public Comment:

Selectmen/Town Administrator Reports

Ms. Monsegur: none

Mr. Mayo wanted to let everyone know that the Emergency Management Team has been meeting on a daily basis for the past several weeks and that they are setting up an Incident Management Team and a formal Incident Command System. He also mentioned that the public is in good hands with the Chiefs Police and Fire and their staff. He added that he works with both Police Chief Olsson and Fire Chief Murphy on a daily basis and they are extremely qualified and very comfortable in their leadership roles. He said that they are represented well when needed by their Deputies, Deputy Lou LaChance (Fire), Deputy Bill Powers (Fire) and Deputy David Jones (Police). He assured the public that the Emergency Management Team is highly qualified and excellent at their jobs.

Mr. Fisher said that Ms. Monsegur and Mr. Mayo were doing incredible work and thanked them for supporting the Town, the Board of Selectmen, and the residents. He also assured the public that they are doing what they can to assist the residents and businesses during this time.

Ms. Power mentioned that the public can visit the website www.discoverhingham.com for opportunities to make donations to the downtown merchants and to purchase gift cards. She also extended appreciation to the many Hingham restaurants who are offering take-out meals, adding that they are both supporting the community and trying to maintain employment and encouraged the public to take advantage of their services.

Ms. Johnson recognized the work of the Massachusetts State delegation including Joan Meschino, Patrick O'Connor, James Murphy and Representative Lynch's office. She also said that the Selectmen are maintaining communication on the State and Federal levels and they are exploring Federal stimulus money and State legislative relief in order to support both the businesses and residents of Hingham.

Vote: Mr. Fisher made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Power seconded.

Roll call vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

Meeting adjourned at: 7:47pm

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