

# Board of Selectmen

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April 14, 2020

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.”

## **Moment of Silence for Barbara Cook**

Ms. Johnson called to the public’s attention the passing of Barbara Cook and asked the public to join the Board in a moment of silence in her honor. Ms. Johnson made the following comments about Ms. Cook:

“Barbara was always looking out for those people who needed a little extra help. Folks know her from town. She volunteered on PTOs and the Hingham High School Council. She was active in the Hingham Food Pantry. I came to know Barbara when she was a member of the School Committee during the economic downturn in the late 2000’s. She served with grace and with a commitment to serve every student in Hingham Public Schools and that’s the way she carried herself no matter what she did. You come across people in life who touch you in a way that surprises you. She was a very special soul and she made me a better person every time I was in her orbit. My heart breaks for her daughters, Caroline and Allison, and her husband John and ask if we could observe a moment of silence in her memory and in her honor.”

## **Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Fisher made a motion to approve the minutes dated April 7, 2020. Ms. Power seconded.

Roll call Vote:

Mr. Fisher-yes

Ms. Power-yes

Ms. Johnson-yes

Ms. Johnson noted for the public that the agendas for the meeting are available on the Town’s website and she gave an overview the items on tonight’s agenda.

## **Update on April 13 Storm**

Town Administrator Tom Mayo gave the following update regarding the April 13, 2020 storm. He stated that our DPW Superintendent referred to this storm as a “major event”. Approximately 38% of HMLP customers were affected to one degree or another. As of this report, only 3-4 customers remain without power. Debris pickup is ongoing and may take several weeks. DPW called two crane crews to assist. Debris pickup may take longer in part because DPW staff are complying with social distancing and PPE guidelines - there is only one person per vehicle, everyone is wearing masks and gloves and being extremely careful. The Fire Department reported over 60 calls between noon and midnight yesterday, much higher than what they’ve seen in the last few weeks. HMLP called Braintree Light to assist in Hingham. There was minor damage to dwellings in town and one car was totaled as a result of the storm. He concluded that there is significant clean-up to be done and the Town is committed to doing so in a safe and efficient manner.

### **COVID-19 Update**

#### COVID-19 Incident Management Team updates:

Mr. Mayo gave the following update from the Town’s Incident Management Team:

“We are preparing for a tough two weeks ahead. Estimates are still that we’ll see a caseload peak/surge around April 20 in Massachusetts. The whole IMT meets every morning at 9:30am to share the latest information, and updates. The command team meets later in the day to review new developments and talk through operational decisions. IMT staff are in regular contact with nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and other residences for seniors and vulnerable citizens in town to advise on procedures and protocols to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. We are also in touch with grocery stores and more than 100 food establishments about social distancing guidelines and new guidance from the state; with local hospitals about their procedures and current capacity; and with residents who have tested positive for COVID-19 to trace close contacts and advise on isolation and quarantine procedures. The IMT team continues to ensure that essential Town staff and first responders have enough personal protective equipment (PPE) to safely do their jobs. We have received one shipment of PPE from MEMA so far and know that funeral homes and long-term care facilities in town have received similar supplies from MEMA. We get regular reports from MEMA and DPH about new state and federal guidelines. The Health Department received a second check for about \$10,000 from DPH for COVID-19 related expenses that we’ll likely use for surge staffing. Everyone on the IMT is working extremely hard to try to flatten the curve.

We continue to follow DPH’s recommendation to report positive cases by county. As of today, the state is reporting 2,207 COVID-19 cases in Plymouth county. We believe that Hingham is experiencing COVID-19 cases proportionally to the other 26 communities in the county. Please keep in mind that the numbers reported by the state are lower than the actual number of cases, as they do not include clinical diagnoses of COVID-19 by medical professionals or people who self-diagnose and stay at home.

Unfortunately, sometimes there is an increase in domestic violence during situations like this where people are confined to their homes for extended periods. Last week, the state announced expansion of SafeLink, the Commonwealth’s statewide, 24/7, toll-free, confidential domestic violence hotline that now includes resources and support for survivors of sexual assault. The SafeLink toll-free number is (877) 785-2020. For the hearing-impaired, the SafeLink TTY number is (877) 521-2601. It is also available

through the 211 line. If you are experiencing violence within your home or you are concerned about a loved one that may be experiencing violence, please call the SafeLink hotline for support and resources. If you are in immediate danger, please call 911.

During this stressful time, it's important to take care of your mental health and help others do the same. If you need emotional support during these stressful times, available resources include:

- Hingham Health Department's licensed Social Worker, Cheryl West. Cheryl is a great resource and she is available via telephone to residents to talk things through or just to listen. She can be reached at 781-804-2370 or by email at [westc@hingham-ma.gov](mailto:westc@hingham-ma.gov).
- Massachusetts residents can dial 211 and choose the "CALL2TALK" option.
- Samaritans is continuing operations 24/7, as always. During this unprecedented time, it can feel overwhelming to receive constant messages about COVID-19. Call or text their 24/7 helpline any time at 877-870-4673.
- Another resource is the Disaster Distress Helpline which can be reached at 1-800-985-5990, and is a 24/7, 365-day-a-year, national hotline dedicated to providing immediate crisis counseling for people who are experiencing emotional distress related to any natural or human-caused disaster, including disease outbreaks like COVID-19. This toll-free, multilingual, and confidential crisis support service is available nationwide.

We've posted messages about these domestic violence and mental health resources on our COVID-19 webpage and Facebook. We know this is a tough time for everyone. We appreciate all of the steps our residents and businesses are taking to protect themselves and others against COVID-19. We are not through this yet - we have to stay vigilant and we appreciate everyone's efforts and sacrifices thus far."

### **Update on Town Services**

Ms. Monsegur gave the following updates regarding Town Services:

“Permitting boards: Town Counsel helped us issue guidance about permit application procedures in effect during the state of emergency to ensure our permitting boards (Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Conservation Committee, etc.) can continue their work. That guidance can be found on the Town website as a newsflash and also on each permitting board's page. As some boards/committees consider using Zoom's video conferencing capabilities, we're staffing all Zoom public meetings to make sure they go smoothly and that everyone can participate. We have a small team of staff from different departments that are quickly becoming Zoom experts.

DPW: I wanted to follow up from last week with a quick update from last week to follow up on the Transfer Station scale being closed. New England Recycling is one option where residents can bring bulky waste/construction. They are located in Taunton and we recommend calling ahead of time to verify fees and drop off times. Their number is 508-822-4345. Our DPW Superintendent also recommends South Shore Recycling Cooperative as another good resource online with information about a number of recycling and trash options. Their website is [www.ssrcoop.info](http://www.ssrcoop.info).

Elder Services: With the help of the Senior Center staff and staff from other Town departments, approximately 200 individual phone calls are being made each week to seniors. Most seniors receiving the calls are very appreciative of the personal contact and eager to talk. At the end of this week, almost

1,000 total calls will have been made. We appreciate their efforts at reaching out to folks in the community. Meals on Wheels, home delivered meals by South Shore Elder Services, are still going out daily from the Senior Center. Three fitness instructors have taken their classes online via Zoom, as well as two discussion groups. Recordings of some fitness classes were also submitted to Harbor Media for viewing on cable. Pre-recorded phone calls are sent out weekly by Elder Services staff to Hingham Seniors, providing resource information and important updates. The next one will feature information about how to get in touch with the Library's tech team for help with technology questions and connecting to digital library resources.

School: Hingham Public Schools rolled out its Remote Learning Plan to students in grades PK-12 last week. The district is now over a week into our Remote Learning Plan and, for the most part, we have received positive feedback. They (the School Department) say that "While no plan can perfectly address the many needs of the variety of families we have in the community, we do feel that the plan has addressed the needs of many, with individual supports being put in place to support those who may need more support. Our plan provides resources for students to be engaged with roughly one-half of the typical school day (e.g., if the typical length of day was 6 hours, remote learning provides work for 3 hours per day). We will continue to refine and re-assess a time goes on to ensure our plan is as responsive as possible."

Last week, the School Committee voted to adjust the school calendar to work through April vacation week (April 21 - 24) to continue the momentum created by the new remote learning plan.

The School Department continues to provide "grab and go" lunches for Hingham students in need. Meals are picked-up Monday - Friday between 9:00 a.m. and 11:30 a.m. at the picnic tables outside of the Hingham High School Cafeteria. If anyone is unable to physically pick-up a meal, they can email Kim Smyth, Director of Food Service, at [ksmyth@hinghamschools.org](mailto:ksmyth@hinghamschools.org) to arrange a home drop-off. The School's Food Services team has also been providing these same meal services to Hingham veterans and their families in need in partnership with our Veterans Services Department, which has been really helpful and has gotten some much-needed resources to people during this difficult time.

And finally, a quick reminder about an upcoming deadline for anyone with younger children listening tonight: The School Department has extended the window for fall Kindergarten registration until this Friday, April 17. Registration forms can be found on the school website. Any family who is registering is strongly encouraged to please let the school department know of your intent to enroll by Friday. These numbers are needed to ensure the proper number of sections and teachers in the fall"

Ms. Johnson thanked both Mr. Mayo and Ms. Monsegur for their comprehensive report. Noting that a number of people had called in to the meeting, she shared some information regarding the meeting procedure, explaining that the Board of Selectmen would discuss each topic from the agenda and after each would ask for questions and comments from the public.

Mr. Fisher thanked Mr. Mayo and Ms. Monsegur as well as the other Town departments for making sure that our town is running efficiently and that we are in good hands. He thanked HMLP for their immediate outreach to the community in response to the storm. Mr. Fisher also Mr. Mayo what the

best time would be for the public to call Hingham's Social Worker. Mr. Mayo explained that since Town staff are working remotely, the public should call the number he stated previously and leave a message. She would then return their call, adding that the Town Hall is technically open for business from 8:30am-4:30pm, but the public could leave a message anytime and she would call back as soon as she is able.

Mr. Fisher commented that he has had inquiries from several residents regarding social distancing and if the Town is intending on enforcing those rules. Mr. Mayo said that right now the Town is following CDC and DPH guidelines and encouraging people to properly social distance, including wearing masks when outside interacting with people and wear gloves as appropriate.

Ms. Power said that she felt that Hingham weathered the recent storm better than some communities. She thanked HMLP for their efforts with managing the storm and asked the public to be patient with the storm clean up due to the fact that the DPW will do the clean-up while also practicing social distancing.

She also directed any media personnel to follow up with an email if they would like access to the COVID-19 update. She also suggested that the update be posted on the Town of Hingham website so the public can be aware of what the Town is doing to keep the residents safe. Ms. Monsegur stated that all of the information would be accessible on the Town's website under "Covid-19 Updates", adding that many of these updates are also available on Hingham's Facebook page.

Ms. Power also commented that social distancing is a partnership that we have with the community and that we all have to do our individual part to emerge from this time quickly and with as little harm to our community as possible.

Ms. Johnson commented that this is already a stressful time personally and professionally and commented that the storm response has placed an extra burden on everyone, including the Police and Fire Departments, HMLP, and the DPW. She commented that the Board has a strong sense of pride in the Town's workforce and she thanked the citizens for supporting the Town departments.

She asked for questions and comments from the public and there were none.

### **New Mooring Field Design for Inner Harbor**

Ms. Johnson stated that at last week's BOS meeting, Harbormaster Ken Corson presented a new, modified design of the inner harbor mooring field. She also commented that now is an optimal time for this reconfiguration because all the moorings had to be removed during the dredging project. In addition, she explained that Harbormaster Corson has made some modifications to the new plan to take into account future modifications to the State boat ramp as well as the additional of floats at Barnes Wharf. Also, she stated that it is her understanding that anyone who already has a mooring would be guaranteed a mooring in the new plan and that the redesign also incorporated safety and boat placement. She asked Harbormaster Corson to make some comments.

Mr. Corson explained that the new plan has received the endorsement of the Harbor Development Committee. He stated that he had presented the revised mooring plan to the Board of Selectmen last week and that he is now looking for their endorsement. He echoed Ms. Johnson's comments that the

changes mainly reflect proposed changes at the boat ramp and Barnes Wharf. He also explained that there could be changes made to the plan going forward if they encounter any challenges with regard to boat placement, etc. to make sure that all boats are accommodated properly. He went on to reiterate that any boat that had a mooring in the harbor last year would be allowed a mooring this year and that, with this new plan, they were able to accommodate a few more boats from the waiting list as well.

Mr. Fisher commented that he has spoken to Harbormaster Corson and explained further that part of the new plan has been created to take into account the size and length of the boats currently in the harbor. Mr. Corson agreed and said that the type (power or sail boat) and size of the boats in the harbor has varied over the years and that the new plan takes into account the type and size of the boats in the harbor last summer as well as the types and sizes of boats currently on the waiting list.

Ms. Power had no further comments and Ms. Johnson thanked Mr. Corson for making himself available for follow up questions from the Board.

Ms. Johnson asked if there were any comments or questions from the public with regard to the new mooring plan and there were none.

**Note:** Ms. Power made a motion to acknowledge the Board's review of the proposed inner harbor basin mooring plan as presented on the Foth Infrastructure and Environment, LLC plan entitled "Hingham Inner Harbor Mooring Plan" dated March 11, 2020, and to approve the Harbormaster's proposed implementation of the plan including such minor modifications of the plan as the Harbormaster may deem appropriate. Mr. Fisher seconded.

Roll call vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

### **Assistant Harbormaster reappointments**

Mr. Corson explained that they have had two Assistant Harbormasters that will not be returning due to the fact that they have been appointed to the Police Department and another two that will not be returning due to the fact that they are graduating from Massachusetts Maritime Academy and are moving on to other jobs. He explained that he would like to appoint three new Assistant Harbormasters to help with staffing needs this summer. He stated that the hiring process started last fall and that all three candidates have passed their pre-employment screening and they all have experience that would benefit the community on the waterfront. He acknowledged that this is a challenging time to bring in new staff to Town government. He further explained that they would be put on a schedule as needed, so should the Town not need their services this summer, they would not be paying them.

Mr. Fisher commented that he has reviewed the three candidates and feel that they are excellent candidates for the Town. He also thanked Harbormaster Corson for respecting the Town's budget by allowing them to be paid as needed thus not placing any additional financial burden on the Town.

Ms. Power agreed with Mr. Fisher and had no further questions. The public did not have any questions or comments as well.

**Vote:** Mr. Fisher made a motion to appoint Bradford Betzner, Michael Nash, and Matthew Puleo as Assistant Harbormasters, working under the discretion of the Harbormaster, for a three-year term ending June 30, 2023. Ms. Power seconded.

Roll call vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

Mr. Mayo made an additional comment, pointing out that two of two of the former Assistant Harbormasters have become Hingham Police Officers and that two others just graduated from the Massachusetts Maritime Academy, adding that Mr. Corson should be very proud of this fact. He said that Mr. Corson does a great job and he thanked him very everything he is doing.

#### **Discussion of extending the due date for tax bills, deferral applications, and exemption applications under Chapter 53 of the Acts of 2020**

Ms. Johnson said that the State controls how the Town of Hingham collects its taxes and what tools are available to us when we make changes in the way and timing of the collection of those taxes. She said that, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, the legislature has been very active trying to anticipate issues and anticipate State resources or solutions. She further explained that under Chapter 53 of the Acts of 2020, the legislature allowed towns to extend the due date for real estate taxes. She added that the Town, led by Treasurer Jean Montgomery, has done extensive research as to the implications of this on the Town as well as the benefit it would afford residents.

Ms. Jean Montgomery thanked the Board for their quick response to this matter. She also said that this newly enacted legislation allows municipalities to do two things: extend the tax due date and reopen the application period for exemptions and deferrals for taxpayers until June 1, 2020. She said that her team has evaluated the repercussions of extending this due date, adding that the Town usually received \$18 million in tax revenue between April 30 and May 1<sup>st</sup> which is used to pay the Town's expenses for April, May and June. She felt that the Town's collection rate was high enough and the Town had a Reserve Fund that was substantial enough that there would not be significant impact from extending the due date by thirty days. She stated that the Town would likely incur approximately \$12,000 in lost interest revenue by accepting this decision. She felt that this decision would benefit small businesses as well as residents who have been touched by the financial implications of the COVID-19 pandemic. She also added that the reopening of the exemption and deferral period would benefit the most vulnerable seniors who may now qualify for a tax exemption. She concluded by saying that the public will be notified of this change through an information bulletin that will be posted on the Town's website as well as push notifications to citizens as well as the Town's Facebook page.

Mr. Fisher thanked Ms. Montgomery and said that their attention to this matter showed the Town's compassion to its citizens who may have been affected by the COVID-19 crisis. He also clarified for the

public that, should they opt to take advantage of this opportunity, there would be no financial implications such as interest. Lastly, he asked Ms. Montgomery if the adoption of this due date extension would have any effect on the Town's credit rating. She stated that she has reviewed this and anticipates that it should not drop more than one point which she felt was appropriate.

Ms. Power said that this was a perfect example of a good time to use the Town's healthy Reserve Fund. Ms. Johnson concurred and felt that they could move forward feeling like this was the correct thing to do.

**Vote:** Ms. Power made a motion that the Board of Selectmen, in accordance with Sections 10(a) (i-iii) of Chapter 53 of the Acts of 2020, extend the due date of property tax bills under G.L. c. 59. Sec 57 and 57C from May 1, 2020 to June 1, 2020. Mr. Fisher seconded.

Roll call vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

**Vote:** Mr. Fisher made a motion that the Board of Selectmen, in accordance with Sections 10(a)(iv) of Chapter 53 of the Acts of 2020, extend the due date under the third paragraph of G.L. c. 59, sec 59 for applications for tax deferral and tax exemptions from April 1, 2020 to June 1, 2020. Ms. Power seconded.

Roll call vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

**Public Comment:**

Ms. Johnson asked if there was public comment for items not on the agenda and there was not.

**Appointments**

**Vote:** Ms. Johnson made a motion to appoint Thomas Carey to the Hingham Public Library Board of Trustees to fill an unexpired term ending June 30, 2020. Ms. Power seconded.

Roll call vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

**Selectmen/Town Administrator Reports**

Ms. Monsegur: nothing to report

Mr. Mayo reported that the DPW crews were working until about midnight last night and back in this morning at 5am and thanked them for their efforts in getting the Town cleaned up after the storm. Mr. Fisher encouraged the public to fill out the Census, adding that doing so would ensure that Hingham gets appropriate funding on a State and Federal level. He also commented that the COVID-19 crisis has unfortunately brought with it new scams, including companies with unsupported claims that their products could treat or cure the Corona Virus as well as fake emails and texts, IRS scams, Social Security scams, Medicare scams, Stimulus check scams, fake Corona Virus websites, fake investment scams and fake charities. He encouraged the public to be alert to these scams. He concluded by saying that he has gotten calls from residents who are saying that they are really impressed by what they are seeing around Town.

Ms. Power commented that she has gotten emails from several residents asking how the COVID-19 crisis is affecting the Town's transition to owning the Water Company. She said that while a lot of their time is focused on COVID-19 and on delivery of services, she wanted to let the community know that they continue to work towards the transition of the Water System and that the Town has weekly Capital calls with Aquarion. Aquarion has made modifications to its operations to ensure continuity of services and safety. She added that they are working on a contract with the Water System Operator, Suez and that they continue to refine their business plan, rules and regulations in conjunction with Environmental Partners Group. She also said that the finance team is preparing the necessary documentation to be ready for financing. She expressed the Board and Town's appreciation for the outstanding work by Town Counsel John Coughlin during this transition period.

Ms. Power also commented that the Hingham Food Pantry has increased the number of times that it is accepting donations of non-perishable items, including the following dates and times:

- Monday, April 20 - 2:30pm-4:0pm
- Wednesday, April 22 - 12:30pm-2:00pm

She also noted that the Hingham Food Pantry's donation bin at the Stop N Shop on Route 3A has been relocated to the far left-hand side of the store where the shopping carts used to be stored. She said that the Food Pantry has reported a 20% increase in use of their services and she encouraged the public for their support.

Ms. Johnson thanked Ms. Sue Nickerson, Town Accountant, for her help in reviewing the Payroll and Accounts Receivable Warrants. She also thanked the Board for placing their confidence in her to get the process done.

Ms. Johnson also stated that the Board had been working with the Massachusetts State delegation to put together a small business resource update which occurred on Monday, April 20. She said that Representative Joan Meschino spearheaded the effort, gathering information which highlighted both State and Federal resources that are available to small businesses. She added that representatives from Jamie Murphy's office and State Senator Patrick O'Conner were on the call as were representatives from various State departments and banks who all made it very clear that they support Hingham's small businesses. She added that the presentation would be made available on the Town's website. She thanked Lynn Barclay of the Hingham Downtown Association for organizing the call and for making sure the merchants know what resources are available to them, as well as Jeff Tocchio from the Hingham

Business Council for making sure that their members were aware of the event. She reminded that public that the “Community Notices” section of the COVID-19 part of the Town’s website continues to let the public know what businesses are open and what restaurants are offering take out and curbside pick-up. She added that the Town is not endorsing any particular business but rather educating the public as to what services are available to residents during this time.

**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: 8:03pm**

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