

# Board of Selectmen

---

April 28, 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

## **Call to order: 7pm**

Ms. Johnson called the meeting to order and explained that the Board would address each item on the agenda and after each would ask the public if there were any questions or comments about that specific agenda item. She then 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 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.”

## **Approval of Minutes**

Mr. Fisher made a motion to approve the minutes dated April 14, 2020. Ms. Power seconded.

Roll call vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

Mr. Fisher made a motion to approve the minutes dated April 21, 2020. Ms. Power seconded.

Roll call vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Power: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

## **COVID-19 Update**

Mr. Mayo gave the following update:

“As you have probably heard, Governor Baker has extended the closure of non-essential businesses, the prohibition on gatherings of more than 10 people, and the Department of Public Health’s (DPH) Stay At Home Advisory until Monday, May 18th. Residents are strongly urged to stay home and avoid unnecessary travel and other unnecessary person-to-person contact during this time period.

Today, Governor Baker also announced the formation of a 17-member Reopening Advisory Board, which will be comprised of 3 public health officials, 3 municipal officials, and 11 leaders from the business community. The three municipal officials are the Mayor of Lawrence, the Mayor of Easthampton, and Boston's Chief of Staff for the Mayor's Office. This group is charged with advising the administration on strategies to reopen the economy in phases based on health and safety metrics. It will develop a report by May 18 that will include DPH approved workplace safety standards, industry frameworks, and customer protocols and guidelines, including enforcement mechanisms and coordination with municipal leaders. While the report is due on the 18th, the administration has made it clear that public health data and guidance from health care experts will dictate the timeline of the re-opening process.

As of today, DPH is reporting 4,744 COVID-19 cases in Plymouth County and 58,302 cases in Massachusetts. As of last Wednesday, the last data available, DPH was reporting 108 confirmed cases in Hingham. Since the state has been expanding COVID-19 testing, particularly in nursing homes, that accounts for part of the increase in COVID-19 cases reported in Hingham. Please keep in mind that the numbers reported by the state are lower than the actual number of cases - they do not include clinical diagnoses of COVID-19 by medical professionals, people who self-diagnose and stay at home, or asymptomatic people who do not realize they have the virus.

The CDC has recommended the use of a simple cloth face covering to help slow the spread of the virus. Covering your face protects others more than it protects you, so it is most effective when we all participate. On Friday, the Hingham Health Department issued an advisory urging members of the public to wear face coverings when a social distance of six feet cannot be maintained in public settings indoors or outdoors. We are distributing signage and will be placing signboards conveying that message at the Transfer Station, Bathing Beach, and at Carlson Field at the entrance to Bare Cove Park. We are asking everyone to take this step for the health and safety of our entire community."

### **Town Services Update**

Ms. Monsegur gave the following update:

"To date, our Elder Services Department has made 1,000 individual phone calls and sent our four recorded messages about Senior Center resources and two recorded messages from our Executive Health Officer to 4,700 recipients each time. They created a 4-minute PSA with Harbor Media on updated resources for Hingham seniors and that announcement is running on the Harbor Media cable channel this week. Our Elder Services Director has been working closely with HinghamLink to connect seniors with resources, especially cloth masks. Senior Center staff are also working to introduce more Zoom classes, including yoga, and they will have likely a memoir writing group start a pilot program via Zoom next week. (781-741-1458)

Our Town Clerk, Eileen McCracken, sent out a message yesterday about the Town Election, which is now scheduled for Saturday, June 27. We want to encourage as many people as possible to participate in the Town Election while minimizing their risk to COVID-19. For that reason, our Clerk has posted links to download applications for absentee ballots and early voting ballots on the Town website. Residents who complete those applications will receive a ballot by mail. The new state legislation allows people taking precautions related to COVID-19 to qualify for an absentee ballot by reason of physical disability. This includes those who are sick, self-quarantined, or those who simply choose not to go to a public

place for their own safety or for a family member's safety. The other option is early voting, which is open to any registered voter in Hingham. There will not be any in-person early voting for the Town election this year."

Ms. Johnson clarified for the public that this year, the only way to participate in early voting is by absentee ballot. Ms. Monsegur answered that was correct and added that Town Hall remains closed.

Mr. Fisher asked for some clarification regarding the order from the Board of Health that made it mandatory for businesses to adhere to social distancing and signage. Ms. Monsegur explained that the Board of Health issued that order last weekend. The order required all essential workers to wear face masks when they cannot practice social distancing. It also required businesses to maintain social distancing between employees and customers as well as posting signage on the doors explaining this order. Ms. Monsegur also commented that this signage is available on the Town's website and added that Susan Sarni and her team in the Health Department are continuing to check in with businesses and restaurants to make sure that they are adhering to this order.

Ms. Power thanked Mr. Mayo and Ms. Monsegur for the update and made some comments regarding the recycling area at the Transfer Station. She acknowledged that it is a little hard to practice social distancing due to the set-up of the recycling area, and encouraged DPW Superintendent Randy Sylvester to continue to monitor this area and to consider whether any additional measures need to take place there. Mr. Mayo commented that he has spoken to Mr. Sylvester about this area and he continues to monitor the area.

Ms. Johnson asked for comments or questions from the public regarding the COVID-19 update and there were none.

### **Forecast Update**

Ms. Johnson began the discussion by saying that the Forecast is the tool that the Town uses on an annual basis to project the revenues that the Town will receive from the tax levy as well as from State aid and local receipts. She added that, after these revenue projections are collected, they are then used to project what will need to be spent on Town services in the upcoming fiscal year. She said that this process begins right after Town Meeting and is updated monthly and sometimes bi-weekly. She said that this year's budget was completed on time, as was the School Committee and Advisory Committee's budgets, in order to put forward a balanced budget for Town Meeting. She commented that these budgets were put together based on projections made during February-early March 2020, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the projected financial impact of the pandemic, the Board will have to make some decisions with respect to the money needed to fund personnel, services and Capital that is required to run the Town due to the drastically changed nature of the State and local economy. She added that tonight, the Board will look at reduced revenue projections and will discuss the Town's approach to the end of the 2020 fiscal year, which ends on June 30, 2020.

Mr. Mayo stated the following projected revenue deficits for FY2020, (not including the schools at this time)

FY20 Projected Revenue Deficits (does not include School at this time)

- \$129,000 in Meals Tax revenue - assumes no revenue for FY20 Q4 (April/May/June 2020)
- \$21,800 in Penalties & Interest collected on property tax as a result of tax due date extension to June 1st
- \$12,000 in Investment Income as a result of property tax due date extension to June 1<sup>st</sup>
- \$212,492 in possible revenue shortfall in South Shore Country Club Enterprise Fund if the Club is closed through May 2020

FY20 Other Revenue Sources

- \$30,000 in HHS federal stimulus grant (ambulances)

**FY20 Projected Revenue Surplus (Deficit): (\$345,292)**

Mr. Mayo commented that he believes that Town has spending and hiring controls in place that will allow for the offsetting of the projected FY20 revenue deficit.

Ms. Power commented that they had previously projected a surplus of \$220,287 at the end of FY20 and asked if this was included in the projected deficit of \$345,292. Town Accountant Sue Nickerson explained that, when the FY20 projections were made, they did not have actual new growth numbers in place yet and she expects the actual deficit to be the difference between these 2 values.

Ms. Johnson noted that the \$30,000 Federal Stimulus grant that the Town receives goes directly to the Town's General Fund, not to the Fire Department, adding that the Town's ambulance service is a revenue generating service for the entire Town.

Mr. Fisher asked if the Town could see a change in ambulance revenues due to the COVID-19 crisis. Mr. Mayo answered that ambulance revenues had been flat until very recently, stating that the Fire Department has reported a small decrease in revenues. Mr. Mayo attributed this decrease to people's trepidation to use the ambulances due to the COVID-19 crisis and said that this will be closely monitored.

Mr. Fisher also asked if Mr. Mayo anticipated the revenue deficit of \$345,292 to be offset by proposed expenditure controls. Mr. Mayo stated that he believed it would be.

Ms. Carol Meyer of the Hingham Anchor asked for clarification on the anticipated deficit and the proposed expenditure controls. Mr. Mayo explained that the previously anticipated surplus of \$220,287 would offset the newly anticipated deficit of \$345,287, leaving a projected deficit as of April 28 of \$125,005, which he felt would be offset by newly enacted spending and hiring controls.

Ms. Johnson said that the Town has been reducing non-essential spending and hiring for several weeks in anticipation of projected deficits because of the COVID-19 crisis and stated that the Town Administrator felt that these reductions would allow the Town to close FY2020 on track. She said that this is a direct result of the careful financial stewardship of the Town Administrator and Assistant Town

Administrator and she was pleased that they felt that FY20 could close without any drastic measures such as a reduction of Town services.

Mr. Mayo stated the following projected revenue deficits for FY2021:

- FY21 Projected Revenue Deficits \$358,093 (0.4%) reduction in Property Tax collection (based on FY08/09)
- \$1,425,400 (14.1%) reduction in State Aid not including MSBA funding for High School (based on 4/15 Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation estimates)
- \$663,307 (14.1%) reduction in Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (assumes holding flat from FY19)
- \$221,000 in Meals Excise Tax - assumes no revenue for FY21 Q1 (July/Aug/Sept 2020)
- \$56,400 (14.1%) reduction in Charges for Services (assumes same decrease as State Aid)
- \$141,000 (14.1%) reduction in Licenses & Permits (assumes same decrease as State Aid)
- \$200,000 reduction in Investment Income (based on cash balance in bank and dropping interest rates)
- \$32,853 (14.1%) reduction in Departmental (assumes same decrease as State Aid)

FY21 Other Revenue Sources

- \$200,000 in additional Excess Overlay

**FY21 Projected Revenue Surplus (Deficit): (\$2,898,053)**

Mr. Mayo added that there is a possibility of a release in some of the Excess Overlay to offset some deficit. He also added there would be some significant reimbursements for COVID-19 related expenses but they are impossible to project right now adding that those reimbursements would go directly to the Fund Balance. He concluded that he was hoping to use all turn backs from the School and Town budgets, as well as other dollars, to offset the deficits realized in FY21.

Ms. Johnson added that the financial success of FY21 requires the cooperation of all Town departments, including the schools, to minimize expenditures.

Mr. Fisher asked about the expected funding for the Foster School project. Mr. Mayo stated that he has had discussions with the Department of Revenue regarding this and they do not anticipate any changes to funding of programs already in place, such as Foster School, but they do anticipate that funding for future projects could be affected.

Mr. Fisher also asked if there were any other grant opportunities, either Federal or State, to help towns offset revenue drops. Mr. Mayo said that they continue to investigate any new revenue streams and/or expense reimbursements.

Ms. Power asked Mr. Mayo to explain some of the cost and hiring controls that have been put in place. Mr. Mayo explained that they have put off the hiring of an Assistant Superintendent of Public Works that they had intended to hire in March. They have also postponed the hiring of an Administrative Assistant at the DPW. Ms. Monsegur added that the Board recently approved the hiring of three

Assistant Harbormasters instead of the initially proposed 4 positions. She added that they continue to evaluate Capital projects and any large purchases to see what they can postpone or forego at this time. Mr. Mayo also said that, on a quarterly basis, Town Accountant Sue Nickerson typically conducts a review of all of the departmental budgets but has begun to do so weekly.

Ms. Power also asked about any cost-management measures that are currently being implemented by the School Department. Mr. Mayo said that the Superintendent has assured him that they have cost reduction measures in place and that they are tracking every dollar. Mr. Mayo also said that the School Department told him they the Board could expect turn backs totaling approximately \$100,000. Ms. Power stated that she was surprised the potential school budget turn backs were not more substantial, and requested more detail from both the school and town budgets relative to FY20 budget turn backs. Mr. Mayo added that he could calculate expected turn backs to the Municipal budget as well as any planned Capital expenditures. Ms. Power concluded by saying that, after five years on the Advisory Board and six years on the Board of Selectmen, this is the most challenging financial circumstance that she has experienced. Ms. Johnson concurred and added that the “unknown” atmosphere of the economy is challenging. Ms. Power also commented that the Board would like to assure the Town at Town Meeting that they continue to look at ways to reduce spending and to keep the Town’s rainy day fund robust. She also commented that she would like to look at additional opportunities for turn backs in the School Department. She hopes that the majority of cost-reduction measures do not disproportionately fall on the Municipal budget thus falling on the backs of the essential workers and first responders who are going “above and beyond” for the Town right now. Ms. Power stated her opinion that all departments need to share in both budget gains and budget pain, and she would need assurances from the School Department and School Committee that they would be willing to make cost reductions if needed. There was additional discussion on the topic by the Board. Ms. Power concluded that, given the uncertainty relative to the duration and depth of the COVID19 impact, she would like to go into Town Meeting with the voters knowing that the Town has done it can to manage costs while also being judicious about spending fund balance.

There were no questions or comments from the public.

There was some additional discussion about the possibility of voting on the proposed budget forecast. The Board agreed that they would like more details from the School Department regarding additional cost-cutting measures. Ms. Johnson thanked Sue Nickerson, Jean Montgomery, Rick Nowlan, Tom Mayo and Michelle Monsegur for their efforts in compiling the Budget Forecast.

**Public Comment**

None

**Appointments**

None

**Selectmen/Town Administrator Reports**

Ms. Monsegur: nothing

Mr. Mayo commented that the Massachusetts State Representatives have been very helpful to him and Town Government. Senator O'Connor and Representative Meschino have both been very proactive in sending along information from the State and also in helping to interpret the onslaught of new legislation. Ms. Johnson concurred and added that she appreciated their outreach to the Town as well as their availability when questions arise.

Mr. Fisher gave a special thanks to the National Guard, specifically the 1058<sup>th</sup> Transportation Company out of the Hingham Armory. He said that they have been transporting PPE to communities throughout the Commonwealth during the COVID-19 pandemic. He added that they have been running missions every day since Governor Baker activated them a month ago and have logged 23,000 miles in that time.

Ms. Power reported that last night she attended the Water Company Transition and Evaluation meeting. She said that the Water Transition and Evaluation Committee, comprised of five residents, has collaborated with Environmental Partners and Jeff Nutting on the DEP Business Plan and on their Rules and Regulations. She reported that their work is going along well.

Ms. Power also commented that she is the Town's liaison to the Plymouth County Advisory Board. She said that Plymouth County has applied for funding under the Cares Act and that there is an outstanding question as to whether the administration of those funds should be left to the County or the State. She added that she would represent the Town of Hingham at 6pm on Thursday, April 30 on a Zoom call with the Plymouth County Advisory Board. She asked Ms. Johnson and Mr. Fisher to speak to Mr. Mayo in an attempt to have her position or possible vote on this matter reflect the position of the Town should she be asked to vote. Mr. Mayo added that the amount of money that has been allotted to Plymouth County is \$90 Million.

Ms. Johnson reported that the Town lost a great American, Hank Maude, on Monday, April 27, 2020. He was a U.S. Army Veteran, a member of the Greatest Generation, and "Mr. Hingham" to a lot of folks. She continued: "Hank served on the Hingham Veteran's Council from 2016-2019 and he was their initial representative from Linden Ponds and was really instrumental in the development of Linden Ponds' Veterans Group. Then he built a bridge with the Town of Hingham and our Veterans Services Officer, Keith Jermyn, to make sure that the veterans at Linden Ponds were connected with the veterans in the greater Hingham community. He served as President of the Linden Ponds Veterans Association. He assisted Keith, our Veterans Services Officer, to make sure that folks there knew that they were entitled to benefits by Massachusetts Law. I know him because he arranged and hosted the Linden Ponds Memorial Day and Veterans Day observances for years. He coordinated and fostered interaction between the High School Veterans Appreciation Club and the Linden Ponds Veterans Association at many civic events...He provided ongoing and wide-ranging support for Hingham veterans at Harbor House and the Lincoln School Apartments. He helped feed veterans nutritious pre-packaged meals at the Commander Anderson Veterans Home. He raised and donated funds to the Town of Hingham "Veterans in Need" Fund on numerous occasions and he participated in the annual History Exposition at GAR Hall. He lived, according to his family, a wonderful 92 years and we are sorry to lose him. He was an institution here, at Linden Ponds and more broadly in the Hingham community and that was because of all the effort he took to build those bridges. I was delighted to meet Hank in 2017 as a brand new member of the Board of Selectmen joining in the observations at Linden Ponds that Hank so

thoughtfully pulled people together for. If we could take a moment of silence in Hank's memory and honor, I would appreciate it. Thank you. Godspeed, Hank. We will miss you."

**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 8:25pm**

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