

## **Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Date: June 11, 2020**

**Place: Remote Meeting via Zoom**

In attendance: Committee Members Victor Baltera, Bob Curley, Julie Strehle, Tom Belyea, Eric Haskell, Eryn Kelley, Evan Sheehan, Libby Claypoole, George Danis, Andy McElaney, Davalene Cooper, Dave Anderson, Nancy MacDonald, Ed Gaydos, Kathleen Almand, and Town Accountant Sue Nickerson.

Absent: None.

Town Administrator Tom Mayo, Assistant Town Administrator Michelle Monsegur, School Superintendent Dr. Paul Austin, and School Committee Chair Michelle Ayer joined the meeting.

Chairman Baltera called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm. He 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."

***Comments from the public regarding items not on the Agenda - None***

### ***Approval of minutes***

Minutes of the Meeting held on 5/12/2020 were approved with revisions on a roll call vote by a vote of 14-0.

Minutes of the Meeting held on 5/14/2020 were approved with revisions on a roll call vote by a vote of 13-0-1 (with Evan Sheehan abstaining).

### ***Hingham Affordable Housing (HAHT) Update***

Davalene Cooper introduced Tim White, Chair of HAHT, for an annual update to AdCom. Mr. White was joined by Treasurer Anita Comerford and new member Amy Farrell.

In a powerpoint presentation, Mr. White detailed HAHT history, current projects, recent projects completed with HAHT support, financial details, and challenges. The purpose of the Trust is to provide for the creation and preservation of affordable housing in the Town for low-to-moderate-income households. Since its inception in 2007, HAHT has received \$2.3 million in funding, primarily from Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds, to support its mission. While HAHT membership consists of citizen volunteers, professional assistance from a Town employee will be needed going forward with financial reporting and real estate transactions (with thanks for past help from Town Accountant Sue Nickerson).

Mr. White described the current definition of affordable housing, and the Town's status in achieving the goal of 10% affordable housing. The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) sets resale limits on affordable units. Currently a two-bedroom affordable housing unit sells for \$200,000, and a three-bed unit sells for \$250,000. In its recent count of the subsidized housing inventory, DHCD acknowledges that Hingham's official percentage of affordable units is 11.4%. In later comments, Chairman Baltera sought to clarify that, although DHCD counts the Town in compliance with MGL chapter 40B by having over 10% of affordable housing, the Town's housing stock does not actually have 10% of affordable units. Mr. White confirmed and stated that the discrepancy is due to how DHCD counts rental housing; for rental projects that provide a certain minimum percentage of affordable units, each rental unit (affordable and market rate) counts toward the inventory of affordable housing units. However in recent apartment developments, only 25% of the rental units are actually priced as affordable.

HAHT is currently involved in five active projects which have the potential for seven housing units. Another potential development opportunity is the Selectman's Parcel at 2 Beal Street. HAHT is the designated developer of the site, and continues to consider whether to build the site as for-sale houses, rental housing, assisted living, or housing for disabled. HAHT is also the sole member of the LLC for the Lincoln School Apartments, which provides 60 units of affordable rental housing for seniors. The apartments are managed by a five-member board of directors, who review property operations, performance to budget, capital needs, and tenant concerns. The property is managed by Corcoran Management, a third party property management company.

Mr. White reported that while HAHT has tried to maximize the funds received mostly from the CPA, along with some linkage funds from developers, there are limited finances to do a job which requires significant finances. HAHT commissioned a Housing Needs Assessment Plan to identify the long term housing needs of the Town. The draft plan has identified the difficulty for young residents to obtain housing, and for seniors to stay in their homes. The challenge lies in meeting these housing needs, whether to provide home ownership opportunities, or increase rental housing. With regard to rental housing, while HAHT has been hesitant to be a landlord because it's a volunteer committee, there is the potential to use a professional third party as manager. The draft of the Housing Needs Assessment Plan is available on the Town's website, and HAHT hopes to have the final plan completed by the end of this year.

AdCom members inquired about current delays on some projects and challenges in increasing housing units on a single property. Bob Curley inquired about how much working capital is available to HAHT until CPA funds become available after Town Meeting. Mr. White replied that currently HAHT does not have funds available to purchase an opportunity if it becomes available. HAHT funds are earmarked for the purposes of developing 499 Cushing Street and the Whiting Street development. HAHT also lends money to the Lincoln School Apartment to help pay down the principal on its loan. Dave Anderson inquired whether, given HAHT's reliance on limited CPA funds, there could be a town-wide initiative to find other non-CPA funds for housing. Mr. White offered that besides seeking grants (such as a recent grant awarded by the

state to develop the property on Rhodes Circle), he would suggest an actual Town Meeting Article to create a new housing funding mechanism.

**Article 11: Transfer to Reserve Fund**

Tom Belyea provided an overview of this Article, Comment, and a recommendation of no action. This Article asks whether the Town will raise and appropriate, or transfer from available funds, a sum of money to the Town's Reserve Fund for use during Fiscal Year 2020, or act on anything relating thereto?

Mr. Belyea explained that this Article is included each year in the event that the existing Reserve Fund is not adequate to cover unbudgeted and unanticipated expenses for the balance of the current Fiscal Year (FY2020). Per Ms. Nickerson, no unanticipated budget expenses are expected for the remaining days of the fiscal year, so no action will be necessary. Chairman Baltera asked Mr. Belyea to add a sentence to the end of the Comment to state that the existing Reserve Fund is adequate, therefore no transfer is needed.

The vote to approve the recommendation by roll call vote was 14-0.

**Article 34: Amend Zoning By-law-update Floodplain map references (possible reconsideration)**

Eric Haskell provided an update on this Article. The original intent of this Article was to update Section III-C of the Town's Zoning By-Law to reflect changes in the Federal government's designation of flood plain areas. Due to interruptions caused by the pandemic, the Federal agency that planned to change its designations of flood plain area didn't end up effecting the change, so if Town changes its By-Law with the passage of this Article, the Town's By-Law would be out of synch with the Federal flood plain maps. The Planning Board will discuss whether to reconsider this Article at its meeting next Monday. Mr. Haskell recommends that AdCom hold off on reconsideration of this Article until the Planning Board makes its decision. AdCom could take up this Article at its meeting scheduled before the start of Town Meeting on 6/20/2020. Chairman Baltera noted that, although a reconsideration by AdCom on 6/20/2020 would not be in time to be included in a supplement to Town Meeting, this issue would not be too complex to describe on the floor of Town Meeting. Chairman Baltera agreed to take up this Article if necessary at AdCom's meeting on 6/20/2020.

**Town Meeting Procedures**

2020 Annual Town Meeting will be held at 2:00 pm on 6/20/2020 at the Hingham High School athletic field. Rain date is 6/21/2020. Gates will open at 12:30 pm. In order to educate voters about the set-up and procedures for this Town Meeting, the Town circulated a framework document, and produced a video to broadcast on Harbor Media which describes check-in, seating, rest room safety procedures, and efforts to keep voters cool. The Moderator hopes to run the meeting as quickly as possible. The BOS will take up the matter of Town Meeting quorum at its meeting scheduled for 6/18/2020, and may lower the quorum necessary to start the meeting, per recent legislation approved by the state.

### ***Town Meeting Preparation***

Chairman Baltera reminded AdCom members that the Moderator's annual Town Meeting organizational meeting is being held via Zoom this Sunday, 6/14/2020, at 2:00 pm. While this meeting is optional for AdCom members, an AdCom meeting agenda has been posted, in case there's a quorum.

Chairman Baltera then reviewed the Warrant and reconfirmed which AdCom members are prepared to speak to each Article. Since Davalene Cooper and Ed Gaydos are unable to attend Town Meeting, some AdCom members volunteered to address any questions on Articles that were originally assigned to Ms. Cooper and Mr. Gaydos.

On the morning of Town Meeting, AdCom will hold a pre-meeting at 11:00 am via Zoom, to review any last minute Town Meeting preparations. AdCom will also address Article 34 (Amend Zoning By-law-update Floodplain map references) if the Planning Board chooses to reconsider that Article, and also any other matters which may require AdCom action before the start of Town Meeting.

### ***Review of Tier 1 Action Plans***

Chairman Baltera reminded AdCom members that the FY21 Financial Plan voted in May by the BOS, AdCom, and School Committee, called for a detailed list of Tier 1 action plans to be submitted to AdCom for review before Town Meeting. Ms. Monsegur reviewed the action plan for the municipal side of government, which includes the specific open positions for which hiring is to be deferred in Q1 and then pushed out further if necessary. The capital section of the action plan lists the essential capital items which need to be purchased in Q1, and then lists other capital items which can be deferred to later in the fiscal year. If revenues are not coming in as anticipated, then those capital purchases will be deferred even further. The action plan will be quarterly since any changes to real estate taxes and State Aid will be identified on this basis.

Chairman Baltera inquired whether specific limits on operating expenses will eventually be listed in the action plan. Ms. Monsegur replied that the plan is to list them at the top of the Tier 1 action plan, along with the personnel expenses. Currently there is not enough concrete information on the revenue numbers to add those steps to limit operating expenses to the action plan. Ms. Monsegur confirmed to Libby Claypoole that department heads were consulted on identifying which unfilled positions can be deferred. The IT department transition costs are not scheduled to occur until Q4. For capital expenses, Ms. Claypoole inquired if there are any potential turnbacks for FY20; and if the departments want to instead spend or encumber those capital funds, then would that capital item be considered an essential item (in terms of the Town already undertaking financial control measures in Tier 1). Ms. Monsegur and Ms. Nickerson both confirmed that departments have been asked to identify whether there are any unspent capital funds which need to be encumbered (so that these items are deemed essential), and which items can be deferred. Ms. Nickerson expects significant General Fund Expenditure turnbacks for FY20, including from the DPW (snow and ice) and Town Engineering budgets.

Dr. Paul Austin joined the discussion to explain the School side of the action plan. There are no new positions in the FY21 budget. All positions listed in the Tier 1 action plan are existing positions, which will be left unfilled until at least Q3. Also, the School Department plans a zero spend start for all supplies, materials, and textbooks. The School Department won't have a clear picture of any COVID-19-related expenses for opening up the schools this fall (or a combination of remote instruction) until August. The School Department is working to obtain reimbursement for unexpected expenses, such as technology. Most capital expenses are deferred to Q3 or Q4, except technology expenses, which are critical.

School Committee Chair Michelle Ayer reiterated that the School Department and School Committee currently have no idea what school will look like in September and beyond, therefore planning for staffing and the budget is a challenge. She stated that the School Committee and School Department were pleased to come to agreement on the Financial Plan, which is a good, prudent plan, and will stick to it.

Mr. Anderson inquired if there is information available at this time about any change to the State's budget, and if COVID-19-related reimbursements are expected from the State or Federal government. Dr. Austin replied that there is no information on reimbursements. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will unveil its prescribed school reopening plan as early as next week, which will have an impact on the school budget. The plan is expected to be a hybrid of remote and in-person education. There will be extra costs for reopening, such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), which in the first three months alone is expected to cost in excess of \$100,000. Dr. Austin added that over 100 people, including staff and parent volunteers, are working on the committee and subcommittees for creation of a school reopening plan.

### ***Discussion of Potential Future Sources of Revenue***

Chairman Baltera opened the conversation on potential future sources of revenue. Given rising expenses and decreasing revenues, it is more difficult each year to balance the budget. Mr. Curley added some suggestions. With over \$1 million in Restricted Fund Balance, he said that it would be good to figure out how to get rid of the restriction and put this money to work at this time. Mr. Curley also added that the Town may want to consider the experience of other municipalities with retail marijuana business, and that adding this kind of business could be a real revenue generator. Mr. Sheehan concurred with the idea, in that the Town should evaluate all possible sources of revenue.

Chairman Baltera suggested the idea of a stormwater utility fee, to move stormwater management money out of the DPW budget into the utility, so that fees would be paid by users. Another source could be unused levy capacity; while the Town plans to use it for senior means tax relief, maybe it could be used otherwise. Chairman Baltera added that suggestions on revenue sources are strictly advisory, as any new or changed Town policies would have to come from the BOS. Mr. Mayo replied that he appreciates any suggestions and ideas. Mr. Curley reported that Selectman Power has discussed the creation of a high level working group to specifically address revenue generation, which would include participation from AdCom. He

expects that the BOS would address this as part of its goal setting after the conclusion of Town Meeting.

Chairman Baltera suggested that the Town could divert part of the annual increase in Fund Balance to the operating budget, although given the experience this year with revenue shortfalls expected due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a healthy Fund Balance may be necessary to balance the budget in years to come. Mr. Sheehan inquired about the idea of changing the tax rate for commercial entities. Ms. Nickerson replied that although this tax rate change is posed annually to the BOS, the Town does not have enough commercial entities to make this work. Mr. Mayo suggested that future development of South Hingham could allow for a tax rate increase for businesses. Mr. Curley suggested the adoption of a hotel tax, similar to the meals tax assessed to diners at restaurants in Town, could be beneficial ahead of any new development in South Hingham.

Finally, Chairman Baltera noted the possibility of a tax override, which is a solution available and undertaken by some towns. However, given the current and future economic impacts of COVID-19, this solution would probably not be a good choice. Selectman Power regularly reminds AdCom that raising taxes risks making the Town unaffordable. Another suggestion would be increased use of revolving funds. The municipal side of Town government currently works on stretching funds through use of revolving funds (such as the Building Department's revolving fund).

***Liaison Reports - None***

***Discussion of Advisory Committee Housekeeping Items***

The next meeting will be the Moderator's annual Town Meeting organizational meeting this Sunday, 6/14/2020, at 2:00 pm. Before Town Meeting on Saturday, 6/20/2020, AdCom will meet via Zoom at 11:00 am. Agenda items include a possible reconsideration of Article 34 and any last minute issues. AdCom will recess and then reconvene at 2:00 pm for Town Meeting at Hingham High School.

The next regular AdCom meeting will be held via Zoom on Tuesday, 6/30/2020, at 7:00 pm. Agenda items will include a debrief on Town Meeting, elections of new officers, and the approval of any necessary interdepartmental transfers. AdCom will also vote to authorize the new AdCom Chair to sign any incoming Reserve Fund transfer requests in early July.

Mr. Curley added that at the conclusion of the AdCom meeting on 6/30/2020 meeting, AdCom members will have a separate "social" meeting via Zoom in lieu of the annual AdCom party. Guests include members of the Board of Selectmen, Town Administrator Tom Mayo, Assistant Town Administrator Michelle Monsegur, Moderator Michael Puzo, and Town Accountant Sue Nickerson.

***Matters Not Anticipated within 48 Hours of the Meeting - None***

Adjourn - 9:36 pm

Respectfully Submitted,  
Julie Strehle, Secretary

List of Documents Distributed for this Meeting:

Agenda

Draft Minutes of Meetings on 5/12/2020, 5/14/2020

Draft Article 11

Town Meeting Outdoor Framework Document

Tier 1 Action Plans

Hingham Affordable Housing Trust Presentation to the Advisory Committee, dated 6/11/2020

Approved on 6/30/2020