

Board of Selectmen

June 18, 2020

Remote meeting via telephone conference call

Present:

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

Call to order: 7:00pm

Ms. Johnson 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 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.”

Consideration of an adjustment of the Town of Hingham 2020 Annual Town Meeting quorum requirements pursuant to Section 7 of Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2020

Ms. Johnson stated that municipalities in Massachusetts who have a Town Meeting may conduct their meeting in several ways. Some towns, such as Hingham, have an Open Town Meeting, where any registered voter can attend and participate. Some other towns have a Representative Town Meeting, where such towns are represented by people who have been voted to be such representatives for the Town. These towns set the number of representatives who would carry out the legislative functions of their Town. Under the Town of Hingham’s by-laws, the Town is required, during a typical year, to have a quorum of 300 people present before the Town Meeting may commence on the first night. After the first night, and on any subsequent night of Town Meeting, the quorum is reduced to 200 residents. Hingham chose to adopt this bifurcated quorum requirement due to the fact that it can be difficult and time consuming to wait for 300 people to show up on the second day of Town Meeting. Because of the COVID-19 crisis, the Massachusetts legislature has provided relief to municipalities in many ways. The State has allowed those towns with a Representative Town Meeting to conduct their Town Meeting via a remote video conference. The State has allowed Open Town Meeting towns to reduce their quorum requirements to as low as 10%. Ms. Johnson explained that she was not in favor of that reduction; instead, she proposed that Hingham’s quorum requirement be reduced to 200 residents. She stated that the Town Moderator had taken the same position.

Mr. Fisher read the following letter from the Town Moderator to Chairman Johnson, dated June 8, 2020:

“Dear Karen,

With our annual Town Meeting set for Saturday, June 20, 2020, and mindful of the continuing State of Emergency declared by Governor Baker, I understand that the Board plans to consider the Town’s

availing itself of emergency legislation that would allow a reduction in the quorum necessary to convene the Town Meeting. While such legislation would allow the Town to reduce its quorum to as low as 10% of what it otherwise would be, I understand that the Board of Selectmen is considering a more modest reduction, specifically from 300 voters to 200. That lower number is already set in our by-law as the number of voters required to convene a second or subsequent session of a regular or special Town Meeting. Given the circumstances, and taking into the fact that threshold is already part of our by-law, please be advised that if the Board should vote to reduce the quorum for the 2020 Annual Town Meeting to 200 voters, pursuant to Section 7 of Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2020, it would be doing so with my approval as Town Moderator.

Michael J. Puzo”

Mr. Fisher commented that he was in agreement with the analysis in Mr. Puzo’s letter and fully supported the reduction of the quorum to 200 voters.

Mr. Mayo noted that he has received communication from Ms. Power, who wanted to explain her absence and to communicate her thoughts on the matter. He read the following communication from Ms. Power:

“Michelle and Tom,

The Plymouth County Advisory Board will be meeting on Thursday, June 18 at 7pm to consider and vote on the FY2021 budget and to receive an update on the Cares Act. As the Town’s liaison to the Board and to ensure the Town is represented and votes, I will be attending that meeting and regrettably will be unavailable to attend the Board of Selectmen meeting scheduled for that night (tonight). I have been fully briefed on the question of modifying the quorum and I support the proposal to lower the quorum to 200. I understand the importance of conducting Town business. Regardless of the quorum, I encourage every Hingham citizen to attend this meeting. I am confident that we have taken the necessary steps to organize a safe and efficient meeting and appreciate everyone’s efforts to that end.”

There were no comments or questions from the public.

Ms. Johnson said that Town officials have gone to great lengths to make the upcoming Town Meeting safe and the Moderator has pledged to make the meeting as efficient as he can. She added that there would be additional tenting to provide shade, cooling stations and water at the meeting. She encouraged citizens to bring additional water and umbrellas for shade. She encouraged all Hingham citizens to attend Town Meeting.

Vote: Mr. Fisher made a motion that, pursuant to Section 7 of Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2020 and consistent with the approval of the Town Moderator as expressed in his letter of June 8, 2020, the Board of Selectmen hereby vote to prescribe the number of voters necessary to constitute a quorum for the Town of Hingham 2020 Annual Town Meeting at two hundred. Ms. Johnson seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

Public Comment

None

Town Administrator and Selectmen Reports

Ms. Monsegur reported that Aquarion Water Company has issued a Code Red Message to Hingham water customers today and read the following message from Aquarion:

“Extremely high seasonal demands are causing a disruption to the water system today including discolored water in certain parts of the system that serves Hingham and North Cohasset. Aquarion is urging customers to limit non-essential use, such as irrigation, which is placing an extremely high demand on the system today that is resulting in water flow disturbances creating discolored water in some areas. As usage drops back to normal levels during the day, episodes of discolored water will be resolved.”

Mr. Mayo reported that they would resume updating the public on the COVID-19 crisis at their meeting next week.

Mr. Fisher thanked Mr. Mayo and Ms. Monsegur and the staff who have been working incredible hours and performing great work for the Town.

Mr. Fisher made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Johnson seconded.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Fisher: yes

Ms. Johnson: yes

Meeting adjourned at 7:35 pm

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