

**TOWN OF HAMILTON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Working Session
JANUARY 14, 2013**

The Board of Selectmen met at Hamilton Town Hall at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, January 14, 2013 with David Neill, Marc Johnson, Jennifer Scuteri, Jeff Stinson and Jeff Hubbard present. Town Manager Michael Lombardo, Finance Director Deborah Nippes-Mena, Police Chief Russell Stevens, Fire Chief Phil Stevens, Chief Dispatcher Anne Marie Cullen, Finance Committee Chair John McWane and Recreation Director Sean Timmons also present.

Call to order

Chair David Neill called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Regional ECO

Town Manager Michael Lombardo summarized results of a meeting that he and Hamilton's public safety officials had with Amesbury representative and Tom Dubos, project manager, regarding the regional dispatch center in Middleton. Town officials had learned available details on the staff model relative to call taking and dispatch for handling 911 calls.

He explained that if Hamilton chose to move its dispatch operation from the public safety building in Town the same radio frequency would be used. This also applies to Wenham, that community has opted to join the regional dispatch center, and a third community could also be added to this frequency.

Lombardo said from a service perspective there would be no enhancements for Hamilton if it decided to join the regional dispatch center. In addition, Middleton expects it to take five years to unify systems from the participating communities.

He added that there were assurances that the state would be paying for a lot of the 911 costs. Also, if the Town opted to join the Middleton center, the dispatch for Hamilton's police, fire and ambulance will work. However, the Town officials did not receive any deeper assurances about what are the long term cost structures and who would pay the bill. Lombardo said he is concerned about the long term costs.

In addition, he noted concern about Hamilton delaying joining Middleton dispatch center for a year and the impact on the Town's existing dispatch employees. He suggested the Town needs a multi-year solution or it will lose the current employees who have to look out for their personal employment interests and may elect to interview for positions in Middleton. Lombardo acknowledged that the \$180,000 in additional costs the Town will incur to operate the local ECO independently as the result of Wenham leaving the operation might be too expensive for Hamilton to absorb.

Neill asked the public safety officials to opine on the advantages and disadvantages of the Town joining the regional dispatch center. He also recognized the \$180,000 in additional costs that Hamilton will incur if it decides to operate the local dispatch center alone due to loss of revenue from Wenham and state grant funds for regional dispatch. The towns of Manchester and Ipswich were approached about ECO but are not interested in joining Hamilton's ECO at this time. Lombardo noted that Town officials have been told that the state has agreed to pay community transition costs to regional dispatch center.

Chief Dispatcher Anne Marie Cullen noted that the regional facility which should be up and running in July was nice and was supported by a lot of state money. However, she had concerns about a small pool of six dispatchers serving six communities.

She stressed the importance of the Town making a decision about whether or not to join the regional dispatch center or continue to operate the local ECO so the Town's dispatchers can make employment decisions. Lombardo concurred and noted that the Town could not wait on this decision until April 6 to have the Town Meeting weigh in so these employees can move forward now. Discussion ensued about how the budget numbers could be reversed on Town Meeting floor regarding this issue if necessary.

In response to Jeff Hubbard who asked if there were other ideas to resolve the dilemma, Cullen mentioned that her first choice in this matter was to get another community onboard at the ECO so the Town would remain eligible for state grant money and the localized service the ECO brings to the residents.

She added that there would be some savings since she is retiring this year and her position would not be filled. Cullen said the Middleton option would be cheaper for the Town but she could not say it was the better answer for Hamilton. She noted that the two communities that have been approached to join

Hamilton's ECO have already budgeted for the service so they are not realizing a loss in funds which could impact their decision to join Hamilton's ECO.

Jennifer Scuteri mentioned that the state of the art equipment at the public safety building would keep the Town in good stead for the short term. Marc Johnson noted the quality of the local dispatchers and how the staffing level would be cut at the regional dispatch center. Also, if the Town opts to go to Middleton, there would be no personnel at the public safety building from 4 to 8 p.m. and some weekend hours.

Police Chief Russell Stevens said he was not opposed to regional dispatch but he was not sure the community would be served as well in Middleton as it is today with local dispatch. He reiterated the issue of no personnel at the public safety building in the late afternoon/evening hours as well as some weekend hours as a consequence of moving dispatch service to Middleton. Also, that there would be additional cost to put a dispatch employee in the public safety building during those hours. He said joining Middleton would not provide better services for the Town. Stevens said he was in favor of change if it was for the better.

Discussed ensued about how a population of 110,000 residents served at the Middleton dispatch center would prompted the addition of dispatchers. This would be dependent upon the number of communities served by the regional center growing from the six currently participating.

In response to Hubbard who inquired about if any other police chiefs in surrounding communities could be persuaded to influence their community's decisions to join Hamilton's ECO, Stevens noted the political agenda at work in this scenario.

Fire Chief Phil Stevens mentioned his concern about the state controlling dispatch service. Also, he thought when there are weather concerns he imagined the number of dispatchers at the regional center could quickly become overwhelmed with the volume of calls.

He noted the service the existing ECO dispatchers provide regarding open burning season in Hamilton by answering resident questions and managing burn permit process. He added that calls to the public safety building during the hours that the building would not be manned if the Town opts to go to Middleton could work but he said in mutual aid situations someone has to be available to provide access to the public safety building.

He also called attention to the hidden costs beyond the \$180,000 such as the transition to GHF versus VHF pagers if the Town opts to go to Middleton, and pay for extra staff in public safety building if that is implemented from 4 to 8 p.m. during the week.

Lombardo advocated keeping the dispatch service in Town for operational reasons noting the long term fiscal concerns as valid especially regarding how this would impact Hamilton's tax rate. Although he thought Hamilton could control the staffing costs.

Neill said it was difficult to go along with the regional dispatch proposal if it was not advantageous to the Town. He supported the public safety personnel in wanting to keep the dispatch service in Town and suggested Town officials continue effort to bring another community onboard at the ECO. Discussion ensued about Town officials having already spent two years with as many as four abutting jurisdictions to bring them onboard at the ECO but this is a tough sell. Also mentioned was that once the Town decides to seek dispatch services outside of the ECO that taking that action is largely a final decision.

Finance Committee Chair John McWane weighed in on the matter and said it would cost taxpayers that own a median priced home of \$400,000 in Hamilton an additional \$50 a year or 13 cents a day to support the \$180,000 cost increase for local dispatch service at the ECO. Discussion ensued about if the Town decided to budget the \$180,000 and keep dispatch services in Hamilton, then at ATM, voters could put a hold on the warrant article dealing with the Town's budget to discuss whether or not to pay for the increased cost of operating ECO. Johnson suggested a meeting could be held to educate the public on this before ATM.

Hubbard said if costs were not involved he was interested in keeping dispatch services in Hamilton but he thought the cost was significant. He was in favor of revisiting the potential of neighboring towns joining the ECO as part of a long term strategy if there was interest. Stinson reiterated the politics involved with approaching other communities for collaboration. Neill expressed his concern about large state projects ultimately costing the Town more money (i.e., regional school system and NESWC) and said option to go to Middleton would continue to be available if it is not acted on now. Johnson was interested in the quality of dispatch services versus extra cost and noted that regionalizing public safety functions for police and fire should be considered as part of a higher quality option. Scuteri noted that if the Town loses dispatchers they could be hard to hire if the Town does not take a definitive vote on the dispatch services/ECO issue.

Neill entertained a motion for the Town to keep the dispatch services in Hamilton at the ECO. Stinson so moved. Scuteri seconded the motion. VOTE: Unanimous.

Discuss and approve draft of the "scope of charge" for the Patton Park Pool Committee

Johnson summarized a draft he had written on the "scope of charge" for the Patton Park Pool Committee. It reflected Board's feedback regarding committee suggesting options and programs before limiting thinking by financial reality. He did include information about cost that would come from Town manager and Town departments. There are two Hamilton residents on the pool committee.

Scuteri suggested the schedule for the committee's public meetings be defined with a completion date of February 28th so information could be discussed before ATM. Discussion ensued about timing where if debt exclusion is considered and approved at ATM, then work on aquatic facility would begin in the fall. Also, that the existing pool would be opened for the upcoming summer season since money has been budgeted for repair. Recreation Director Sean Timmons noted that one to two public meetings would be held to get community participation and input to assess level of resident interest in an aquatic facility.

Discussion also addressed that the pool committee would not be responsible for making a funding decision regardless of the fact that Community Preservation Act funds would be used to fund a portion of the project. Also mentioned was that actual numbers would be worked out and that \$1.5 million was the maximum number that would possibly be considered for a facility and there may not be room in the tax rate. Lombardo clarified that 200 people a day use the Patton Park pool during the season.

In response to McWane who asked if an invitation to participate and fund an aquatic facility at Patton Park was extended to Wenham, Timmons said that Hamilton and Wenham Community Preservation Committees were approached. The Hamilton Town Meeting approved \$102,000 of CPA funds for design costs and Wenham Town Meeting did not support providing any funding for a pool project at Patton Park. He added if moving forward this is a Hamilton-only funded project the user fees and rates from Wenham would reflect that. Hubbard said if Wenham is not going to participate there should not be representation on the pool committee. Wenham selectman Patrick Wilson is currently a committee

member and could provide input on Wenham's interest. McWane suggested a warrant article be developed for Wenham's ATM to assess participation interest.

Neill noted that the pool committee should not have to worry about whether or not Wenham is participating, that the joint Recreation program for the two towns uses the pool, the pool was built for Hamilton children and children from both towns use the park pool. He added that they have to find a way to capture cost from Wenhamites. Timmons recommended they push forward with one to two meetings and he said the community wants to provide input on the matter. Discussion ensued about moving ahead to determine the community's desire for an aquatic facility, identifying options and deciding on funding, that Lombardo is analyzing septic system requirements related to aquatic facility changes at the park, that CPA funds are currently designated just for facility design, Lombardo will assess if Timmons needs any additional administrative support relative to this project, and a placeholder has been placed on draft ATM warrant.

Neill entertained a motion to approve the "scope of charge" for the Patton Park Pool Committee as amended. Stinson so moved. Hubbard seconded motion. VOTE: Unanimous. Lombardo noted that Board would discuss this topic at the end of February and make a decision relative to scope and timing.

Warrant Articles for Annual Town Meeting April 6, 2013

Discussion ensued about proposed warrant articles for ATM on April 6 including a placeholder for Depot Square easement relative to potential septic field for Mike's Auto under parking lot, Hamilton Development Corporation and potential opportunities with sites that fall under Great Estates bylaw, consideration of addition of bylaw obligating abutting landowners to shovel sidewalks and relative citizen input although Town has received no complaints about sidewalks being shoveled and impact on elderly residents as well as resident liability, and need to review nuisance bylaws.

Budget FY 14

Lombardo explained that dates need to be defined for working sessions on Town budget and that \$180,000 has to be found from this year's budget to fund ECO. Finance Director Deborah Nippes-Mena outlined additional costs in budget including permitting software, facilities management at the Patton property (where a person living at site reduces insurance cost dramatically), ECO with lower unemployment costs (\$16,000) and \$32,000 was put back into healthcare.

She noted that HWRSD school budget number is \$16 million and public safety building debt was adjusted to \$130,000, with a total Town budget of \$23,657,000. The current tax rate is \$18.06 and is expected to go up to \$18.61.

Lombardo told the Board that a decision is needed to resolve lack of progress to jointly schedule programs between the Hamilton and Wenham Council on Aging organizations as was expected when shared director was hired. The existing scenario with the two agencies is making the situation untenable for staff. In addition, the model for elder transportation has to change due to the current state vehicle requirements that do not allow the flexibility needed with low ridership in Hamilton and Wenham.

Discussion ensued about the HWRSD school budget where McWane said School Committee Chair Roger Keubel is asking Superintendent of Schools Michael Harvey to come up with a budget that is lower by an additional \$400,000 than was proposed for the two towns to keep the tax rate at \$18 per \$1,000.

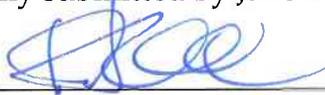
Also addressed was 5% of Free Cash recommended for Hamilton where there is \$1.2 million so as much as \$700,000 could be used to offset the tax rate with the \$180,000 for the ECO added back into Town budget but intent is to keep large enough balance so Hamilton can pay its bills without borrowing. Another goal for the Town is to strengthen its Stabilization Fund. Discussion continued about setting up dates for budget working sessions although McWane suggested that most budget items had been resolved. Also addressed was HWRSD looking at school choice with an eye to the actual per pupil cost of \$9,000. Board will decide if it is attending joint meeting with two towns' FinComs and schools on Jan. 30.

Executive Session

Neill entertained a motion for the Selectmen to go into Executive Session at 9:21 p.m. not to return to open session pursuant to M.G.L. c.30A, Section 21a(2) for the purpose of negotiating a contract with the Town Manager, as an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on Town's negotiating position. Johnson so moved. Stinson seconded motion. Roll call vote: Scuteri, yes, Johnson, yes, Neill, yes, Stinson, yes, Hubbard, yes.

Respectfully submitted by Jane Dooley, Minutes Secretary

ATTEST: _____



Clerk

