

HAMILTON FINANCE AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
Minutes of Meeting  
May 29, 2019

Members Present: John Pruellage, Phil Stearns (Chair), Nick Tensen, and David Wanger.  
Others Present: Christina Schenk Hargrove.

This Hamilton Finance and Advisory Committee meeting was called to order at 7:01 pm at the Hamilton Council on Aging Building, Bay Road, Hamilton.

**Public Comment**

**Presentation by the Waste Reduction Committee**

Gretel Clark and Anne Gero were present to discuss the trash rates. Trash had increased 50% while composting had decreased 33%. After alternate week collection had been changed to every week, a dramatic change occurred. Ms. Clark said that 44% (160) of MA towns had some form of “pay as you throw” programs. Some towns had a full “pay as you throw” while others, including Hamilton had a per portion program. Ms. Clark thought changes might in part be due to an influx of new families each year (140) as they had not been through the learning process. The Waste Reduction Committee decided to go on the Multiple Listing Service database and send a letter explaining the trash program to new residents.

The Selectmen had decided to keep the every week collection and provide public education instead of reverting to alternate week collection as had been done in the past. DEP funded a postcard showing what could and could not be composted and recycled. A full letter of information about the trash program was mailed two months later. Other educational opportunities included an article in the Chronicle, letters to the editor, and the electronic billboard. No effect was experienced, which Gretel Clark found discouraging.

Previously there was no tipping fee for recycling but currently, Casella calculated what was paid to them as a tipping fee, which was more than trash. According to Gretel Clark, some cities and towns had abandoned recycling and used trash alone because it was less expensive after China stopped buying recyclables. While there were no savings for recycling, Ms. Clark said there were savings by composting and that she hoped the Selectmen would enact a policy to keep food waste out of trash.

Anne Gero said Manchester by the Sea was 100% “pay as you throw” by using paid-for plastic bags but there were other models where residents signed up for certain sized trash bins and were billed quarterly like water and sewer. Gretel Clark suggested raising the cost of bags in Hamilton and said four towns charged \$5.00 per bag, one town charged \$4.00 and one town charged \$3.00. Ms. Clark said she would raise the cost to \$5.00.

It was suggested, that the Town currently spent \$600,000 for trash collection. If the Town reverted to every other week, the cost savings would not be huge, according to Anne Gero. Originally the composting rate was 10 to 12% but had slid to as low as 7%. Composting was 8.44% in 2018. 25% of the trash stream was solid, compostable waste. Brick Ends Farm charged \$45 per ton for composting while trash cost \$67.84 per ton. The five-year trash contract would expire in June 2020. The City of Boston currently signed a contract for \$80 a ton, which should be assumed for Hamilton versus \$45 to dispose of organics. The total savings would be \$16,000. It was noted that some residents would prefer to spend the \$16,000 on trash collection.

Last fall, the Town paid Casella \$64.08 per ton for recyclables and paid \$67.84 to burn trash. Originally the Town received money for recyclables then China banned recyclables with more than 3% contamination.

David Wanger noted the new Selectboard and wondered what beyond every other week collection the Waste Reduction Committee might want. Gretel Clark wanted to raise the cost of the bags. Anne Gero wanted to have mandatory composting. Casella had indicated that even if collection were every other week, they would need to do the whole route for composting and recycling. If collection were every other week, residents would need to buy blue bags for their off week trash. Mr. Wanger noted the increasing costs of the Schools and thought giving the residents a chance to reduce costs would be beneficial. Mr. Wanger said the Waste Reduction Committee should suggest a policy in yearly stages to obtain control of the trash situation. Ms. Clark said the Selectmen could create the policy without Town Meeting approval.

According to Gretel Clark, Casella said recyclables were less contaminated when composting was used. Trash collection cost \$17,750 per month for trucks. Anne Gero added that trash collection was a lump sum per year no matter the weight. Composting tonnage varied at Brick Ends Farm. The Wheelabrator was \$600,000 for hauling, employees, and collection. The collection fee could not be changed until 2026 at the end of the contract but could be offset by the sale of blue bags. Casella had a collection fee, disposal fee to the incinerator, a disposal fee for recycling, and a disposal fee to Brick Ends Farm with three separate rates for disposal but one rate for collection. 51.54% of the 2018 tonnage went to the incinerator and 8.44% were organics that went to Brick Ends Farm.

#### **Discussion regarding revised budget from the School.**

Joe Domelowicz and Marisa Batista were not present to discuss the topic. The revised School Budget was incorporated into the Town Budget but the projected tax rate was not available. The savings from the not approved OPEB proposal would be about \$.09 per thousand valuation. The preliminary projection of 16.91 would be reduced to approximately 16.82. Other issues that might affect the tax rate were being considered.

Discussion ensued regarding the School's responsibility for OPEB. The original 30 year schedule to fund the liability began with a \$250,000 contribution the first year. Hamilton passed

the proposal but Wenham did not. Wenham separated the article due to financial issues. \$160,000 would be returned to Hamilton, saving approximately \$.09 on the tax rate.

#### **Discussion of Town Counsel and other litigation cost review**

Miyares and Harrington would define what “special matters” entailed. The firm had been asked to summarize what the total cost for each project was. Marisa Batista had reportedly created a spreadsheet of the cell tower litigation for FY18 and FY19 to date, which was over \$25,900 above the retainer. Other attorneys were involved as well. David Wanger asked what the retainer covered as the first paragraph was indiscernible. Clarification would be sought.

Legal costs included \$21,000 for the Planning Board, \$16,000 for 227 Willow St., and \$15,000 for the Patton Marijuana Project. The FinCom hoped to do a better job projecting and minimizing costs. David Wanger wanted to determine the hourly rate and have a clear view of the retainer. Christina Schenk Hargrove suggested changing the retainer agreement to negotiate the price. David Wanger and Christina Schenk Hargrove would work on a list of what was needed and send it to Joe Domelowicz.

The Capital Committee would be comprised of Jack Lawrence, Heather Ford, Dave Thompson, Bob Woodbury, and Bill Wilson. David Wanger noted there was an initiative to increase the five member board to a seven member board to accommodate Scott Maddern, who could not be appointed quickly due to the wait time from being an elected official.

#### **Discussion with Town Manager regarding the FY21 Budget calendar and any finance related updates.**

The current Budget calendar would be presented to the Selectmen. One side of the page defined April Town Meeting while the other side defined October Town Meeting. Nick Tensen questioned the need for a Fall Town Meeting. Phil Stearns noted that no Citizens’ Petitions had been filed and no Planning Board articles were pending. Marisa Batista’s opinion would be sought regarding budget adjustments. Ms. Batista would attend the next FinCom meeting.

#### **Discussion regarding Finance Committee vacancies and meeting with potential candidates.**

Christina Schenk Hargrove was present at the current meeting. Ms. Schenk Hargrove announced that she had been involved with Workers’ Compensation, employment discrimination, real estate, small business, estate planning, trust, probate, medical malpractice, and liability legal work. Ms. Schenk Hargrove attended Boston College law school and would e-mail her resume to the group. David Wanger asked if Ms. Schenk Hargrove had a preconceived idea or agenda to push forward. Ms. Schenk Hargrove responded that she had lived in Hamilton for fifteen years but had been working in Boston. Ms. Schenk Hargrove said she wanted to become more involved in town. She was leaving her firm in Boston and would be opening an office in Hamilton. Phil Stearns, Mr. Wanger, and John Pruellage described the role of the FinCom. The appointment was on the agenda for the Selectmen. Mr. Stearns would contact Jeff Hubbard and introduce Ms. Schenk Hargrove to Mr. Hubbard and copy Joe Domelowicz.

**Committee Member and Liaison updates.**

All members had attended the Town Hall Building Committee meeting. Phil Stearns asked them to respond to the survey. Mr. Stearns discussed other “hot issues” such as the Planning Board review of Green Meadows Farm. One estimate said the Farm would use 500,000 gallons of water each year. A group of citizens, including the neighboring Patton Ridge residents were challenging the proposal.

The ConsCom was working on the Conservancy District By-law.

Public Safety was thought to be pursuing owning an ambulance service as Wenham’s had shown a profit. The purchase price of an ambulance was \$65,000 (used) to \$200,000 (new). Nick Tensen noted that if the Towns were to merge, it would not be an issue. Discussion ensued regarding the benefits of a merger.

Nick Tensen would meet with the Fire and Police Departments the following day to discuss the analysis of call fireman costs, including equipment and training in comparison to cost per fire. David Wanger recalled the Housing Master Plan meeting wherein a slide indicated that Hamilton’s population was declining while neighboring towns were increasing. While the expert at the presentation had no answer, Mr. Tensen suggested that it may be due to the number of people residing in each home. The aging population might be due to children leaving town and not returning. There were more seniors in town than children. The ratio of children from each town had been beneficial to Hamilton in regard to School funding.

The Committee discussed if, as a group they should make a recommendation regarding Town Hall proposals. Saving the historic stairwell would save \$750,000 at a cost of \$8.5M. Bonded over 30 years, the difference would be \$.04 to \$.05. Phil Stearns was concerned that focusing on cost could leave a building not large enough to accommodate the Town for ten years. Nick Tensen thought the stairs were aesthetically interesting but wanted to have an addition with room to grow. David Wanger said the Town Hall was more than utilitarian as it was a magnet for the town’s image. The Town Hall was on the National Register of Historic Places. It was decided that it would be premature to make a recommendation.

**Approve Minutes for May 8, 2019.**

Motion made by Nick Tensen to approve the minutes of May 8, 2019.

Seconded by David Wanger.

Vote: Unanimous in favor (4-0).

**Other topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair.**

Marisa Batista had requested an increase to the Recreation Budget as it spent funds before revenue was collected. The current limit was \$250,000 and spending was already at \$230,000.

Ms. Batista requested that the FinCom consider increasing the budget to \$300,000 as approved at Town Meeting.

Motion to increase the Revolving Fund spending limit budget for the Recreation Department Revolving Fund from the current limit of \$250,000 to a requested spending limit of \$300,000 made by John Pruellage.

Nick Tensen seconded.

Vote: Unanimous in favor (4-0).

Phil Stearns said he had been asked to help screen candidates for the Treasurer/Collector position. This would not involve budget issues. The Committee agreed this was fine and not against any Committee membership requirements.

**Determine agenda for next meeting.**

Legal expenses, the Town Hall Building Committee, and Budget calendar would be discussed.

**Adjournment**

John Pruellage made motion to adjourn.


Seconded by David Wanger.

Vote: Unanimous to adjourn at 9:11.

Prepared by:

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Marcie Ricker

  
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Attest

Date

6/12/19