

HAMILTON FINANCE AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Minutes of Meeting
June 12, 2019

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

Others Present:

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

Discussion regarding an invitation to Chris LaPointe for presentation on Open Space economics.

Phil Stearns recalled that he had heard from the minutes secretary that evidence indicated that open space was more cost effective than residential development. The Town of Hamilton needed to increase income. The article supplied by Chris LaPointe showed increasing commercial or industrial uses was necessary to increase income. There was no space for commercial or industrial space, according to Mr. Stearns. Mr. LaPointe spearheaded the Sagamore acquisition and Mr. Stearns suggested inviting Mr. LaPointe to a meeting to discuss the dynamics of development versus open space. John Pruellage said the town might need to have both open space and commercial development. David Wanger discussed the decline in population to which the Town Manager had indicated the population dynamics in general might have changed, but Mr. Wanger noted it would be similar in other towns. Mr. Wanger wondered if there was a systemic issue in Hamilton that needed to be addressed. Nick Tensen said the composition could have changed or development may not have been as robust. Patton Ridge (six houses) was the latest development, which had been built several years ago. It was noted that even Wenham had more development than Hamilton.

Discussion regarding Town Hall Building Committee proposals, and voting on any recommendations.

All members had a summary of the survey. The staircase did not appear to be very important but a stronger majority had indicated approval of putting an addition out back. David Wanger noted the positive stair response was closer than other questions (206 respondents). Overwhelming response to question 3 showed that there was no attachment to the old stage. Respondents were fine with question 4 by an overwhelming majority.

Phil Stearns noted that the design process was on track. The FinCom would make a recommendation to the Selectmen who would make a decision. Mike Twomey (Town Hall Building Committee) reportedly thought it was premature for the FinCom to make a recommendation until the Town Hall Building Committee made theirs. David Wanger thought a

recommendation to the Selectmen and the Committee as it formulated its recommendation, might be helpful because the FinCom should engage on the issue due to cost implications and other issues related to the Town. Mr. Stearns said the Town Hall Building Committee would be sending their recommendation to the Selectmen on Monday.

A decision was needed by the middle of June for the Town Hall Building Committee to meet with the architect who would prepare design drawings and an estimate by Fall Town Meeting. It was agreed that by moving a wall, the larger meeting room could be accomplished in options A and B. Phil Stearns noted that improving Town Hall during this renovation should accommodate changes for the future rather than needing to renovate again in five years. Mr. Stearns said he was leaning toward putting the elevator inside and if, in ten years, more space was needed, the addition outside could be used. The stairway could be taken down later. Mr. Stearns and Nick Tensen agreed that both solutions solved the immediate need but long term flexibility rested with having an addition outside the existing Town Hall. The stairway, which was considered an aesthetic link to the past, could be removed at a later date. Christina Schenk-Hargrove said the staircase was an attraction or had an emotional value to the town. She pointed out that 45% of respondents said they did not want the stairs removed.

Phil Stearns thought the Town Hall Building Committee would recommend the less expensive option in the hopes it would be approved. David Wanger recalled that Wenham had retained the historic character on the outside of the building but that the inside seemed sterile and inconsistent with the “Gestalt” of tradition. Mr. Wanger was concerned that would be the case in Hamilton if the past were not retained. It was noted that the cost differential over time should not drive the decision. Members agreed that the stairs should be retained with an addition being constructed outside the building.

Motion made by David Wanger that the FinCom advise the Town Hall Building Committee and make a recommendation to the Selectmen that the FinCom supports Option B, which is the option with the exterior elevator and saving the stairwell for the reasons that we believe this design allows more flexibility for the Town’s expansion in the future, saves more of the historical value which is meaningful to citizens, and that the increment represents a minimal cost over time to taxpayers. Mr. Wanger suggested advising the Town Hall Building Committee of the recommendation but making the recommendation to the Selectmen.

Seconded by Nick Tensen.

Vote: Unanimous in favor.

Discussion of Town Counsel and other litigation cost review.

Phil Stearns recalled that he had met with Joe Domelowicz and Darcy Dale. Mr. Domelowicz continued to work on obtaining litigation costs from Miyares and Harrington. Mr. Domelowicz reportedly announced that he would not renew the retainer contract with the firm as they were unable to identify costs or how the retainer was spent. A copy of his email was distributed to the members. Mr. Domelowicz had reportedly said he would be taking a different approach to Town

expenses. David Wanger said he wanted a copy of the retainer and supplemental agreements from the past. Allison Jenkins had submitted an email disagreeing with the decision as so much institutional knowledge would be lost, especially in a time when there were so many changes in so many departments. Members agreed that the FinCom would offer assistance to find a new Town Counsel. The FinCom could make recommendations as to the future as they needed to be part of the give and take of the new firm's proposal as well as seeing what the old retainer was along with costs for special projects. The FinCom needed to be in the informational loop in the decision process.

John Pruellage suggested sending a note to Joe Domelowicz reinforcing the request for information about the retainer and contracts as well as the presenting the intent that the FinCom wanted to be involved in the selection of a new Town Counsel. Christine Schenk-Hargrove wanted clarification as to the different approach as mentioned by the Town Manager. The retainer would depend on what was covered and should have a manner in which hours were tracked.

Discussion with Town Manager regarding the FY21 budget calendar and any finance related updates.

Phil Stearns said Darcy Dale, Joe Domelowicz, and Marisa Batista said a Fall Town Meeting was necessary to cover financial issues. It was undecided if the Town Clerk would be an appointed position or an elected position. The Town Hall Building Committee needed funding to go forward with design development to obtain a full bid at Annual Town Meeting.

The FinCom wanted more time to write recommendations for Town Meeting. John Pruellage said it was too hard to have Warrant hearings the last two weeks of August. Discussion ensued regarding the timing of the Warrant being mailed versus the Warrant hearings. It was agreed that if Warrants were mailed a month ahead, the attendance at Town Meeting might be minimal.

Discussion regarding Finance Committee vacancies and meeting with potential candidates.

No candidates for future positions had been found. Phil Stearns said he had interviewed candidates for the Collector's position with three very good candidates being present.

Committee Member and Liaison Updates.

PILOT payments had not made any progress. John Pruellage explained the history of the non-profits in town and how they affected the Town. A task force had been created to approach the topic. Phil Stearns described the responsibilities of liaison assignments.

John Pruellage said there was a new interim superintendent from Scarboro, ME who apparently had an interest in the long term position. Jeff Sands had resigned as he did not have unanimous support of the School Committee. Beauport ambulance service might request more money for Fall Town Meeting. Senior transit would no longer be provided and would cost \$10,500.

Phil Stearns described the opposition to the Patton/Green Meadows proposal, noting that the news reported the Patton family was putting the proposal on hold. The School Resource Officer (SRO) was being paid for by the Town of Hamilton. The ZBA canceled their meeting with Green Meadows Farm. Police Chief Stevens reportedly said the process could not be stopped. The neighbor in Topsfield rallied neighbors to shut the proposal down. David Wanger noted the loss of tax income and the commitment to the SRO. Nick Tensen thought it was \$75,000 for the officer in the budget, which was the incremental cost to using an existing officer and backfilling his position with a less costly officer who would be used to fill summertime vacation positions. Mr. Wanger said the position was to be funded through Green Meadows property tax and business taxes. Joe Domelowicz would be asked about the situation.

Nick Tensen met with the Fire/Safety department. Ray Brunet hoped to have another full-time position and would be putting together information regarding offsets such as less overtime. There might be interest in starting an ambulance service as Wenham's service had been so profitable. Wenham paid \$7,000 for its ambulance, which may have affected the profitability.

Approve Minutes for May 29, 2019.

Motion made by John Pruellage to approve the minutes of May 29, 2019.
Seconded by David Wanger.
Vote: Unanimous in favor (5-0).

Other topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair.

Determine agenda for next meeting.

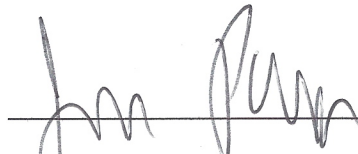
Chris LaPointe would be contacted for a discussion on open space. Joe Domelowicz would discuss the Town Counsel situation and the Budget Calendar. Marisa Batista would provide the Quarterly Report. Town Hall would be considered. Green Meadows would be discussed. As it would be the last meeting of the fiscal year, officer positions would be discussed.

Adjournment

John Pruellage made motion to adjourn.
Seconded by David Wanger.
Vote: Unanimous to adjourn at 8:35.

Prepared by:

Marcie Ricker



Attest



Date

7/10/2019