

HAMILTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN

MINUTES OF MEETING

Town Hall Memorial Room, 577 Bay Road

February 24, 2020

Selectmen Present: Chair Jeff Hubbard, Rosemary Kennedy, Shawn Farrell, Darcy Dale, and William Olson

Town Manager: Joe Domelowicz

Jeff Hubbard called the Board of Selectmen (BOS) meeting to order at 7 p.m. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & BOARD OPENINGS

- The Council on Aging (COA), Hamilton Historic District Commission (HHDC), Open Space Committee, Essex North Shore Agricultural & Technical School Committee (appointed by the Moderator), and the Conservation Commission (ConCom) each have one opening. The Hamilton Development Corporation (HDC) has two openings.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

Selectmen/Town Manager Reports

William Olson reported he's been working as a member of the Screening Committee to select the new Hamilton-Wenham Regional School Superintendent. The Committee hopes to have recommendations to the School Committee by March 9. Mr. Hubbard asked if the interim superintendent was one of the candidates; Mr. Olson responded yes.

Rosemary Kennedy said she met with Bert Comins, the new conservation agent, and will attend a ConCom meeting Wednesday evening to discuss the Wetlands Protection bylaw. She reported Sharon Road residents were happy with their road closure.

Shawn Farrell said the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) is still in need of a coordinator (to replace Dorr Fox) and has an opening for a Planning Board liaison. There

will be a joint CPA training (with Wenham's CPC) the third Thursday in March and a joint meeting in May or June to discuss each town's capital asks. Mr. Farrell said the CPC had discussed the idea of changing the Town's 2% surcharge to 3% and what the impact would be in terms of having more money for capital projects. He cited some figures and said it would require a Citizen's Petition and Town Meeting vote to implement the increase. At its meeting, the CPC reviewed ongoing bonds, what they paying out in grants, and projects they are closing out.

Darcy Dale had no report.

Mr. Hubbard said his only report was that the Town Hall Building Committee would meet Wednesday at 4:30 p.m.

Town Manager Joe Domelowicz said his full report would be posted tomorrow. He said traffic consultants recommended closing Sharon Road on its Asbury Street end, citing fewer impacts on traffic flow and public safety. He said the Town was pursuing a parking and traffic study for the Willow Street/Downtown District; he's been in conversation with HDC President Rick Mitchell about that. The Town is working with Asbury Grove on its water billing concerns, with the idea of segregating seasonal usage as much as possible and installing a separate meter for the pool. They are also looking to separately meter the three year-round homes located there. There are still some unknowns about the Grove's water infrastructure needed to be ascertained. Mr. Domelowicz said he is looking at withdrawing from the Eastern Essex Veterans District in favor of an alternative offering Hamilton's veterans the same level of service for less money. He attended a CATA (Cape Ann Transportation Authority) meeting, and said the stakeholders agreed to roll out service to currently "unserved" communities first and then slowly expand the service area. The plan is to have service to Danvers, Peabody, and Salem and a once- or twice-per-month trip to Boston's medical campuses.

CONSENT AGENDA

- Approve appointment of Election Workers
- Approve 25th Annual Melody Miles Road Race
- Approve request to purchase cemetery lot
- Approve request to hang "VOTE" banner on tennis court fence
- Reappoint members of the Waste Reduction Committee
- Approve BOS – Jan. *31, 2020 meeting minutes *Correct date is Jan. 13.

Ms. Dale placed a hold on the last item (the meeting minutes).

Decision:

Mr. Farrell made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda excluding the held item. Ms. Kennedy seconded the motion. The BOS voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the motion.

Decision:

Darcy noted the minutes' date should read Jan. 13 (not Jan. 31). She made a motion to approve the Jan. 13 meeting minutes. Ms. Kennedy seconded the motion. The BOS voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the minutes.

AGENDA

Approve Proposed Water Rate Structure—Vote

Department of Public Works (DPW) Director Tim Olson said he met with the Finance and Advisory Committee (FinCom) to review the options for changing the water rate structure, and the FinCom recommended Option 3, which only had a small use of retained earnings. Mr. Domelowicz explained FinCom felt increasing the infrastructure fee was a more equitable way to share the cost burden [of all the water infrastructure work that's been done in Town] among all users. A water rate increase might be needed, but they were trying to minimize it at 10% the first year, he said. Another suggestion by Mr. Domelowicz and the FinCom was to switch to the practice of reviewing the water rates annually.

Mr. [William] Olson spoke in favor of FinCom's recommendation, which was raising the infrastructure fee (from about \$60 to \$80 per quarter), utilizing about \$100K in retained earnings to do this, and raising the water rates by about 10%.

Mr. [William] Olson inquired about also changing the tiers, but Mr. [Tim] Olson said going from five tiers to three would negatively affect some over others and he thought it an easier transition to leave the tiers as they are and apply a 10% increase to them. Mr. [William] Olson asked what the average increase amounted to; Mr. [Tim] Olson replied about \$30-\$40 per quarter or \$120-\$160 per year. Mr. Domelowicz clarified it was difficult to give an average as it depends upon what tier a resident is in.

Patti Miller, 8 Maple Ave., had a question on Hamilton's water source and wanted to know if Hamilton had to pay for the actual cost of getting the water from the Ipswich watershed. Mr. [Tim] Olson replied no.

Joyce Wendling, 424 Asbury St., asked for explanation of the water infrastructure fee. She expressed that she's heard Hamilton has a really old system needing a lot of work. She was worried new neighborhoods coming onto the system might negatively impact the old water pipes. Mr. [Tim] Olson said the only problem might be is if there is air in the system, but pipes bursting shouldn't be a big worry. He cited they hadn't had any issues when Canter Brook tapped into the system last fall. Ms. Wendling asked if new developments might impact water pressure; he said no, the pressure was pretty standard. Mr. Farrell responded that with new developments, the contractors would be responsible for upgrading to new pipes. Ms. Wendling had thoughtful concerns about how water rate increases projecting out over 10 years might affect her and others. Mr. Farrell gave some history on the water rates, that they hadn't increased much in about 15 or so years and were way below that of surrounding towns. There was a substantial increase about five years ago, he said, with a

moratorium on increasing for five years, and now again, the BOS was trying to find the least hurtful solution for the taxpayers.

Decision:

Mr. Farrell made a motion that the BOS approve Option 3 (an \$80 infrastructure fee and 10% water rate increase through all five tiers), utilizing the recommended amount of retained earnings, and starting with the fourth quarter bill. Ms. Kennedy seconded the motion. The BOS voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the motion.

Mr. Farrell asked if the BOS should make a motion to review the water rates annually. Mr. Domelowicz said he would make a point to talk about it every year and will keep an eye on the situation. If rates increase too much, people might start hesitating to use the water and that doesn't help the Town as then water revenues would go down. They need to keep that all in perspective.

Mr. Farrell gave a plug for the rain barrel program, a system for catching rain to use in one's garden. The cost for an unpainted barrel is \$60; painted barrel is \$75. They can be ordered and picked up on April 18.

Approve Proposed Budget for FY 2021—Vote

Mr. Domelowicz referred to a two-page document in the packets, which shows the Town's total budget (expenses) at \$34,835,510, including the School Department's ask (that will be split into two articles). If both articles pass, the tax rate would amount to about 50 cents more on the tax rate.

Ms. Kennedy raised the issue that it is a significant raise on the tax rate from a year ago; the Schools' ask was an 8.57% increase over last year. Mr. Farrell noted they are voting the total amount for now. Mr. Hubbard commented that one option would be to not approve it. Ms. Dale suggested using language that said "not to exceed" the figure (\$34,835,510). Mr. Domelowicz clarified the BOS first needed to approve the dollar amount and then would formulate the language for the two warrant article motions.

Decision:

Mr. Olson made a motion that the BOS confirm the FY21 budget ask of \$34,835,510 with the caveat that the BOS will split up the budget article into two warrant articles at the Annual Town Meeting and that the amount is not to exceed \$34,835,510. Ms. Dale seconded the motion. The BOS voted unanimously (5-0) to accept the motion.

Mr. Farrell thanked Mr. Domelowicz and Finance Director Marisa Batista for their hard work on the budget and for always getting back to him in a timely manner. Mr. Domelowicz said Ms. Batista was taking some much needed and well deserved time off.

Approve Ballot for Town Election—Vote

Mr. Hubbard read the required notice of the Presidential Primaries being held for Precincts One, Two, and Three at 16 Union St., Hamilton, on March 3, 2020 from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. for the purpose of casting votes in the Presidential Primaries for Presidential Preference, State Committee Members (First Essex & Middlesex Senatorial District), and Town Committee (Town of Hamilton).

Mr. [William] Olson inquired about early voting. Mr. Domelowicz said it started today and they had more than 100 voters come in.

Decision:

Mr. Farrell made a motion to approve the Ballot for the Presidential Primary and Town Election for March 3. Ms. Dale seconded the motion. The BOS voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the motion.

All Selectmen signed the document.

Discuss Upcoming Meeting Schedule

The BOS discussed its upcoming meeting dates: March 9, March 16, and March 23. The warrant will go to the printer on March 20. Mr. [William] Olson said he had an obligation with the School Committee's superintendent screening committee on March 9 and is starting medical leave on March 10. It was decided the next BOS meeting would be set for March 16 and will most likely be a joint meeting with the FinCom. Mr. Hubbard may add a meeting for March 9 in the meantime if there is enough on the agenda to require it. Mr. Farrell suggested a 6 or 6:30 p.m. start time on March 16 to keep the meeting from running too late. Mr. Olson said he will need to attend the March 16 meeting remotely.

Mr. Domelowicz asked Mr. [William] Olson for Greg Alexander's contact info. He is the contact for the automated vote counters ("clickers") the Town is going to test out at Town Meeting.

Consideration of Topics for Discussion at Future BOS Meetings

None.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

- To discuss strategy related to potential litigation

Adjournment into Executive Session

Decision:

At 7:55 p.m., Mr. Farrell made a motion that the BOS adjourn the regular meeting and enter Executive Session for the purpose of discussing strategy related to potential litigation and that they not return to open session at the end of the Executive Session. Ms. Kennedy seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken with "ayes" from Mr. Olson, Ms. Kennedy, Ms. Dale, Mr. Farrell, and Mr. Hubbard. The BOS voted unanimously (5-0) to enter into Executive Session and not return to open session.

Prepared by:

Mary Alice Cookson 4-17-2020
Mary Alice Cookson Date
Minutes Secretary

Attest:

Darcy Dale 4-17-2020
Darcy Dale Date
Board of Selectmen Clerk