



Town of Hamilton
Select Board
Meeting Minutes of April 22, 2025

Pursuant to the Open Meeting Law, MGL Chapter 30 A, §§ 18-25, written notice posted by the Town Clerk delivered to all Select Board members, a meeting of the Hamilton Select Board was posted for April 22, 2025 at 6:30pm. This meeting was held via zoom only.

The Select Board functions as the Chief Executive body of the Town. Its five members are elected to three-year terms with one or two seats up for election each year. The Board acts as the chief policy making body of the Town and directly supervises the activities of the Town Manager. The Select Board typically meets the first and third Monday evening at 7:00 p.m.

Select Board: Ben Galuza (2028); Thomas Myers (2028); Bill Wilson (2026); William Olson (2027); Rosemary Kennedy (2027).

Call to order: With a quorum present, B.Wilson called the meeting to order at 6:34pm. Present: B.Wilson, R.Kennedy, W.Olson, T.Myers, B.Galuza. Also present: Joe Domelowicz, Town Manager, and others as noted.

- **Organize the Select Board for the coming year**

- **Nominations & Votes for Select Board Chair:** B.Wilson nominated W.Olson for Chair and he accepted the nomination.

Vote: The Board voted unanimously by roll call to approve W.Olson as Chair of the Select Board

- **Nominations & Votes for Select Board Vice Chair:** T.Myers nominated B.Wilson as Vice-Chair, and he accepted the nomination. B.Wilson nominated R.Kennedy, but the motion was not seconded.

Vote: The Board voted unanimously by roll call to approve B.Wilson as Vice-Chair of the Select Board

- **Nominations & Votes for Select Board Clerk/Secretary:** W.Olson nominated R.Kennedy as Clerk, and she accepted the nomination.

Vote: The Board voted unanimously by roll call to approve R.Kennedy as Clerk of the Select Board

The Vice-Chair announced Board and Committee openings as displayed on the agenda:

- Affordable Housing Trust – 1 opening
- Conservation Commission – 2 openings
- Council on Aging - 1 associate openings
- Cultural Council - 1 associate openings
- Community Preservation Committee – 1 opening for member of Historic District Commission
- Historic District Commission - 2 openings for 3-year terms, 2 openings for 2-year terms
- Human Rights Commission - 1 opening
- Hamilton Wenham Cultural Council – 3 openings

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Public Comment – Three (3) minutes per person on items not already on the agenda:

- **Ned Flynn, Sias Lane, Wenham** questioned whether there would be a vote at the Special Town Meeting to change the threshold for voting on school questions. J.Domelowicz replied that no, there would not be, and explained the process for making changes to the Regional Agreement.
- **Michelle Horgan, School Street**, asked if there could be a forum to explain what could happen to the Winthrop School site if the consolidated school is approved. She believes that there is a lot of confusion around what might happen there. Chair Olson stated that there is nothing currently happening and nothing has been proposed or decided about the Winthrop site.
- **Walter Lizinsky, Honeysuckle Rd.**, stated he has lived in Hamilton for 56 years, and things have changed - that there are many one article voters in town, and they get up and leave Town Meeting after their one item. He believes the Board needs to talk more to these people.

Town Reports:

- **B.Galuza** - stated he was grateful for the support and happy to be part of the Select Board.
- **J.Domelowicz** stated that he and R.Kennedy attended a meeting regarding the HW Regional School Agreement, and briefly explained the process.

CONSENT AGENDA:

- **Approve HW Garden Club Banner at COA May 3 – May 10, 2025**
- **Approve annual Amphibious Vehicle Race at Patton Park on May 15, 2025**

- **Approve minutes of March 24, 2025**

Vote: The Board voted unanimously by roll call to approve the consent agenda.

AGENDA:

- **Approve appointment of Joanie Melanson to the Hamilton-Wenham Cultural Council – Discuss & Vote**

Vote: The Board voted unanimously by roll call to approve the consent agenda.

- **Recap of Annual Town Meeting**

B.Wilson thanked everyone who attended, volunteered, and staffed the Town Meeting, and stated it was a historic turnout and robust discussions. He thought it was a great Town Meeting overall. T.Myers added that he was impressed with the level of dialogue and discussion. B.Galuza echoed the thanks and positive comments, though he noted the need for better family spaces with better A/V support, and hoped there could be improvement, and would like to consider virtual options and other ideas. J.Domelowicz stated that in Massachusetts, the law does not allow for an open Town Meeting to be held remotely or in hybrid format, even though that is an option for representative Town Meetings.

- **Beth Herr, Asbury St.**, expressed thanks for having the scrolling screen that showed people that their voting clickers were working.

- **Updates for Special Town Meeting**

- **Discuss vote of School Committee re: Consolidated School Proposal**

Superintendent Eric Tracy explained the MSBA (Massachusetts School Building Authority) process. February 26, 2025 was when the MSBA board voted to bring HW into project scope and budget, which is the start of a 120 day window for school districts to gain financing approvals. The process that started on that date was quickly done through the town meetings on April 5th and then the ballot votes immediately following. The town meeting votes did not pass at the requisite two-thirds votes, although the ballots did receive majorities. The school committee after some discussion at their last meeting decided to request inclusion on the warrant for the same items in Hamilton: \$142 million for the school department for the Hamilton Wenham Elementary School project, and also the 50-year lease for the Cutler property. The School has been keeping the MSBA apprised of what's been happening. The Select Board has already received a letter from the School Committee chair regarding the request for those items to be placed on the warrant. The Superintendent talked about continuing to do community conversations and community meetings to make sure the facts are known and questions are answered. Anyone can request to subscribe to the Superintendent's newsletter.

The Board stated that there needed to be more conversation about why renovation is not the chosen pathway, and Superintendent Tracy explained that when you renovate, the buildings essentially stay the same, including the layout and the rooms, you don't gain any floor space, which is one of the reasons for choosing this project, that we need more spaces for children in specialized programs, which have expanded significantly in the past 15 years. There are also constraints, such as the laws don't allow kids within a 48-month range to be in the same program, so a second grader and a fifth grader can't be together in the same program, which then requires more space than a regular classroom. The existing schools were not designed for what the needs of children are today. It would be necessary to do a renovation addition to gain any more space. It is difficult to bring back out of district services because of a lack of space. A renovation would also require the children to be relocated to modular buildings while the construction is underway, which equates to paying for portable classrooms. The middle and high school are using all their spaces, and it is not feasible to incorporate elementary school students there, such as moving the 5th graders to the middle school.

In order to pursue renovations of the elementary schools, a new MSBA process would have to be started in April, by submitting an expression of interest. Even if accepted within a year or two, it is a five-year process to do the design and the MSBA process. It was clear through the process that the Cutler School has the greatest need in terms of being rebuilt, Winthrop is second, and Buker is third. MSBA will only consider one elementary school renovation for a school district at a time. The cost is also dependent on how the schools currently meet code or not, such as for sprinkler systems, ADA compliance and so forth. Both town Finance Committees did a tremendous amount of work in looking at the cost projections and came to the same conclusions. There are no legal impediments to bringing the vote back to Special Town Meeting. The Buker school is usable and has some life left in it, but will still require some work, including security improvements.

B.Galuza summarized that it sounds like it would be at least 6-8 years before a new process could play out, and he asked how long the timeline would be without going through the MSBA process. The Superintendent clarified that it is still a long process without MSBA because of the State laws on school design, and you still have to hire designers and contractors through bid processes with engineering firms. It would also still have to pass the two votes in each town to move forward. Losing this project means the loss of \$50 million and years before anything else could be done. Superintendent Tracy also pointed out that even if one school were to be done, there is the possibility that the Towns will lose their appetite to do two more and they might never get done. Additionally, if there is a 40% tariff on steel, how will the towns afford the future construction.

- **Deb Stafford, Maple St**, said she needed to take a breath, and feels the Superintendent's comments were re-litigating what has already been discussed the last 18 months and the push back from the community has been clear. She stated the supermajority was not achieved at Town Meeting and to consider a re-vote is like bad parenting. She believes it is reckless of the committee to take another vote, and that the votes that were taken should stand. She then read a statement "from the community" stating that it was signed by over 200 people, and that she had obtained wet signatures from all of them.
- **Jack David, Louis Street**, thanked the Select Board and the Superintendent for good faith efforts, and he believes the vote should not be placed back on the warrant for four reasons including that it will distract from the discussion on 3A, that unless there were irregularities or fraud in the voting, it should not be re-voted as there is no reason to do it. In addition, the most accurate record of Hamilton voting is the ballot, which was evenly divided. He also stated that the polling done was not shared with the public.
- **Rick Mitchell, Rock Maple Ave**, stated in terms of respecting the will of the voters, the vote was over 50% at the ballot, and that is democracy - 50% plus one, and that is what the country was founded on. Less than 20% of the community was at Town Meeting, so there is a large silent majority who didn't express an opinion. He also stated that reconsideration of issues is the norm in Hamilton, as happened with the senior overlay district bylaw and the public safety building. A re-vote is not some unusual occurrence, it is a thoughtful reconsideration. He stated that the elementary schools are defunct, they do not work, and they need to be replaced. He believes nothing will happen if this project is not approved, it will be too costly and take decades. He cited the example of Ipswich, which could not get approval for a consolidated school project and seven years later they are now looking at a cost of \$160million for a school as opposed to the \$60 million in the original proposal. He asked the Board to support the School Committee and the Wenham Select Board in bringing this to Special Town Meeting, and he asked to keep 3A separate from the Special Town Meeting.
- **Cheryl Thompson, Talley Ho Drive**, noted she sent a letter to the School Committee and copied it to both Select Boards, and proceeded to read it for the record. She believes the School Committee asking the two Select Boards to re-vote is not leadership, and that they have ignored the will of the voters, and she asks that there is no re-vote.
- **Beth Herr, Asbury St**, stated the non-pro-consolidation people don't have a level playing field as a superintendent does because if they sign up for his messaging, then they only get that viewpoint. She stated the School Committee just approved a \$450,000 feasibility study for the High School roof. She thinks people should put on their thinking caps and find solutions instead of pointing to roadblocks. She also stated she is not an architect or an engineer but she has heard that there is water on the Cutler property and it is horrible, she would never build there. She also claimed that she was doxxed by someone putting a photo of her house on Facebook which is unacceptable.
- **Ted Ober, Gale Ave**, talked about how the schools were structured in the past with the older and younger kids separated. He believes there are many options for renovation and that people have to question why the schools are in such disrepair. He was here for the Middle School vote and it was a clear no vote, and was brought back three times to get a yes vote. He thinks everyone should go back and find out what the people want.
- **Tosh Blake, Sagamore St**, stated he agreed with previous speakers on postponing a vote on 3A while there are many things up in the air. He believes the Town may need the Winthrop site later for an expanded school, and we should keep that site available for a school. He asked what happens when the population grows beyond the school capacity. Although the renovation can create difficulties, it can be done. He believes there are not the votes to get this project approved.
- **Linda Preston, Highland St**, stated citizens have asked what if the school project did not achieve the required vote. She cited the Middle School vote that was voted a third time against the will of the Town. She asked what part of no the Town doesn't understand. She believes if this is the process of democracy then it is tragic. She asked the Board to do what is right and vote no on a revote.
- **Edward Flynn, Sias Lane, Wenham** stated he has been to the Wenham Select Board to ask what 3A is going to cost and has done some number crunching. He believes there will be 992 new students if all the 3A housing is built. He believes it is short sighted to make a decision on the school now given what may happen.
- **Kathrine Facile, Homestead St**, spoke about the Middle School vote and she was a direct beneficiary of that and is thankful the Town worked so hard to make that a reality. She said she never felt such commitment from her Town as she did upon entering a brand-new school. Her mother fought for the Middle School and likewise, she is fighting for the new elementary school for her two children. She has appreciated the openness and transparency of the process. She believes the school consolidation will bring the children together better. She noted that there is a long history of an open and dynamic legislative process and she advocated for bringing it back for another vote. She also proposed a two-town Town Meeting for everyone to be in the room together.
- **Ashley Gleti Chase, Bridge St**, noted she has attended every Town Meeting since she moved to New England and stayed to the end of the meeting. She stated she is fiercely advocating for this project because she is worried about taxes and believes that the renovation plan in the long run is going to cost us more. She noted she works in education and how we deliver programs and the way we address needs has fundamentally changed in recent decades. She highlighted that if there is a renovation within the existing footprint as some people are advocating, the spaces are still inadequate. She stated that the gym at 3,000 square feet is 50% the size of the standard 6,000, the music room is 30% smaller than it is supposed to be, the media

center is 46% below the standard, special education classroom is undersized and it's supposed to be the same size as the general ed classrooms, the kitchen is half the appropriate size, one of the kindergarten rooms is almost 25% below standard and doesn't have a toilet room. There isn't space for the faculty to eat lunch, and that is a dignity issue. There isn't the space to expand without a renovation/addition. A renovation project would be pouring millions of dollars into an old building that would still not meet the needs of our students. She advocated for a revote.

- **Katherine Spano, Linden St**, supports the School Committee and the Select Board in bringing a revote. After digging into the facts, she became convinced this is the best solution. She is concerned for her kids and for all kids in the community who are not able to be served by buildings built in 1952 and 1961. She stated that although the school vote passed the ballot by a thin margin, the results of the other elections speak to the broader support of this project. She thanked everyone who has been involved.
- **Jeff Austin**, stated it is unfair to hold the time and money over the heads of the anti-consolidation people as the polls told everyone that this plan would not pass. He stated he was told by the Superintendent that there are no structural issues with the current schools. J. Austin therefore believes everything that needs to be done can be done through renovation. He stated that 10 years ago the State rated Cutler and Winthrop as 1s and 2s in their evaluation, which means they need work but they are not horrendous. He believes enrollment is down 30% over the last 20 years and how you can't reconfigure the buildings to make it work is beyond him.
- **Susan McLaughlin, Park St** noted that she emailed the Select Board and asked that to be entered into the record.

J. Domelowicz noted that approximately 70 emails had been submitted to the Select Board and all will be included in the record. R. Kennedy read a letter from resident Mimi Fanning, expressing her concerns on behalf of seniors and questioning why people should vote if the vote will be brought up again and again. She asked for this issue to be given more thought.

Chair Olsen appreciated the passion of tonight's meeting, but a majority of the Town has voted for this, and his opinion is that it is fair to the community to hold a re-vote.

T. Myers agreed, and stated it is important issue and it is very difficult to achieve the 2/3 majority. He stated that bringing it back for a vote is so commonplace that the MSBA has guidance on it. He stated the role of the Select Board is to decide what is in the best interest of the Town, and his opinion is that a revote is in the best interest of the Town.

R. Kennedy stated it is extremely disrespectful of the Select Board to bring this back for a revote, and that they have an obligation to fulfill the rules and law that have been promised to abide by. Citizens deserve to have their votes respected. She would strongly vote against bringing this back for a revote.

B. Wilson noted he was struggling, having heard the crowd and read the communications. All of the elected Boards and the Finance Committee have come together to say this is the most fiscally responsible and far-reaching program to put on the table that covers most children. He reiterated that he is struggling with this as the 2/3 vote was not met, but fiscally the right solution has come forward.

Chair Olsen stated seven votes had been taken, and all were in the majority, including the two Select Boards and the School Committee. He advocated for keeping the discussion open and putting it back on the warrant in June.

B. Galuza stated he was also struggling to see how we go from where the town is now, to entertaining the renovation/expansion idea, which would be very expensive to do, and how would the town move forward on a timeline that could have a positive impact for the kids. He has not heard anything today that told him how the town would practically move forward as an entire community on the renovation path.

Chair Olsen commented there was confusion among many voters as to whether 50% majority was required and therefore many people did not come to vote, not realizing that 2/3 majority is actually required at Town Meeting.

The Board asked if there is more information to come forward from the Schools that may be new information, that may change people's minds, and essentially to keep the dialogue going.

A motion was made and seconded that the Select Board include the school consolidation vote on the warrant for the June Special Town Meeting.

After some additional discussion the Board agreed to table the vote.

- **Review timeline for June 26, 2025 Special Town Meeting** - *This item was deferred to the next meeting.*
- **Approve Select Board meeting calendar June – December 2025** - The schedule was briefly discussed, there were no comments from the Board.

New Business

- **Communication from President Scott Sundquist at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary**

The communication from S. Sundquist was included for informational purposes.

- Chair Olsen reminded everyone on zoom that if they would like to participate remotely, they must list their full name on their zoom profile in order to be let into the meeting. The Board will discuss this further at another meeting.

- The Board discussed the possibility of selecting another date for the Special Town meeting, other timelines may be considered next time.

Adjournment Vote: *The Select Board voted unanimously by roll call to adjourn the meeting at approximately 9:41PM.*

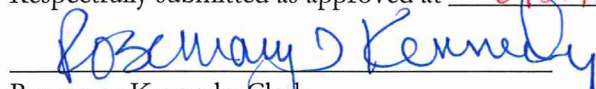
Meeting Packet Enclosures:

- Minutes of March 24, 2025 Select Board meeting
- Request to hang Hamilton Wenham Garden Club Banner
- Request for use of Patton Park Facilities
- Request to appoint Joanie Melanson to HW Cultural Council
- 2025 Special Town Meeting Calendar
- Select Board Meeting Dates
- Email from Scott Sundquist of Gordon Conwell Seminary

Respectfully submitted by D. Pierotti, Recording Secretary, 4/27/25.

The minutes were prepared from video.

Respectfully submitted as approved at 6/2/25 meeting.



Rosemary Kennedy, Clerk