

HAMILTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES OF MEETING
AND
MINUTES OF JOINT MEETING
WITH WENHAM BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Teleconference

April 13, 2020

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

Wenham Selectmen Present: Chair Jack Wilhelm and Catherine
Harrison

Town Manager: Joe Domelowicz

Wenham Town Administrator: Anthony Ansaldi

These two posted meetings were conducted consecutively via Zoom teleconference with all participants remaining at home.

Call to Order – BOS MEETING

At 6:03 p.m., Board of Selectmen (BOS) Chair Jeff Hubbard opened the BOS meeting. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Finance and Advisory Committee (FinCom) Chair David Wanger noted he and Valerie McCormack were present, but the FinCom did not have a quorum.

CONSENT AGENDA

- Approve Minutes of the Jan. 29, 2020 Joint Meeting of the Hamilton and Wenham BOS, Finance & Advisory Committee (FinCom), and HWRSD [Hamilton Wenham Regional School District] Capital Financial Planning Subcommittee.
- Approve Minutes of the Feb. 10, Feb. 24, and March 16 BOS meetings.
- Approve Minutes of the March 3 BOS Special Meeting.

- Approve Minutes of the March 23 BOS and Board of Health (BOH) Emergency Joint Meeting.

Decision:

Darcy Dale made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. William Olson seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken with “ayes” from Ms. Dale, Mr. Olson, Rosemary Kennedy, Shawn Farrell, and Mr. Hubbard, (5-0) unanimous.

Mr. Hubbard said Ms. Kennedy had an update. She said the Hamilton Affordable Housing Trust (HAHT) had voted unanimously to support the Mac’s Shoe project on Willow Street and she’d advocated for senior affordable housing there at 60% of AMI (Area Median Income). The developer had rejected her initial request for four apartments at 60% of AMI, but her counter had been to see if the HAHT and HDC [Hamilton Development Corporation] would consider funding two apartments at 60%. They are going to see if it can be done. As the projects stands, nine of the apartments will be at 80% of AMI, which means the rents are still high for seniors on fixed incomes. Mr. Hubbard expressed concern the HAHT was taking \$500K [grant awarded to the developer] and essentially paying the HDC. He suggested putting the topic on the next agenda. Ms. Dale added she thought Town Counsel Tom McEnaney should be involved in the discussion.

AGENDA

COVID 19 (Coronavirus Discussion) – David Smith, BOH

Board of Health (BOH) Chair David Smith said as of today, there are three positive COVID-19 cases in Hamilton. Another six cases are “expired” because the patients completed isolation protocol and are now considered not contagious. Hamilton is also tracking seven who are in quarantine due to having had contact with someone who tested positive. Responding to a question from Mr. Wanger, Mr. Smith elaborated there’s been one death in Hamilton attributed to the virus. He said the curve in Essex County was previously going up exponentially but is now going linearly; the curve is not flattening yet.

Ms. Dale asked if the numbers are a function of density. Mr. Smith said yes. He shared information about a study on the presence of antibiotics in waterways coming from water treatment plants. He also stressed that due to lack of testing, the numbers do not reflect real numbers and could be 10 times higher than what has been reported. He said he’s observed most people wearing masks lately. That and adhering to stay-at-home orders has been helping prevent the spread. He commented he’s been observing the Crosby’s store and parking lot and is pleased with the social distancing and other steps taken, such as limiting the number of people who can be in the store at any one time.

Town Manager Joe Domelowicz reported Wenham's Public Health Nurse Maribeth Ting just wrote on the meeting chat line that Wenham is reporting their cases differently from Hamilton; Wenham is not separating active cases from total cases. Wenham has had seven total reported positive cases.

Ms. Dale asked if the BOH would consider making wearing masks mandatory. He replied the BOH would be voting on that at its next meeting. Ms. Kennedy asked if the BOH would be discussing wearing masks indoors as well as outdoors. He said they would address the former at a minimum and possibly the latter.

Mr. Domelowicz said a quorum from the Wenham BOS just joined the meeting in preparation for the joint meeting set to start at 6:30 p.m.

Update on Local Government Operations

Mr. Domelowicz gave a brief update about efforts to limit the number of workers at Town Hall. He said he is continuing budget discussions with department heads on reducing expenses. Late Friday he said they received the latest draft of the warrant for Town Meeting, which includes everything except the budget proposal that's in process.

Mr. Wanger asked if the letter had gone out to citizens regarding extended deadlines for property taxes. Mr. Domelowicz responded the State had said a letter wasn't required, but the Town needed to post the information through its regular channels, the website, social media, etc. He said the Town would issue a Code Red on it. Ms. Dale asked if they could continually update Mr. Hubbard's video message so it would keep appearing at the top of the search. Mr. Domelowicz agreed to refresh it about once a week. Ms. Kennedy said she was impressed with Town services. A friend of hers recently was able to obtain a marriage license and have a drive-by wedding. Mr. Olson said he sent Mr. Domelowicz a note about looking at recent water usage since many residents are now home 24/7. Mr. Domelowicz said he will see how they can estimate the usage.

Updates from State Actions – Tom McEnaney

Not discussed as Town Counsel McEnaney was not present.

Call to Order – JOINT MEETING

At 6:30 p.m., Jeff Hubbard opened the Hamilton BOS and Wenham BOS joint meeting. The two boards took roll call. Wenham BOS members Jack Wilhelm (Chair) and Catherine Harrison were present, which was a quorum (two of the three members). Wenham Town Administrator Anthony Ansaldi was also present.

Coordinating Rescheduling of Town Meeting and Town Election

Mr. Hubbard confirmed with Mr. Ansaldi that the two towns had previously agreed to wait to determine a date for Annual Town Meeting (ATM) to avoid having to postpone it later if something were to happen pertaining to COVID-19. However, Mr. Ansaldi noted Massachusetts General Law does require the towns to hold their elections by June 30. He said he and Mr. Domelowicz had discussed having a “Save the Date” for Town Meeting for June 20, but not to take an official vote yet. Mr. Hubbard thought it made sense. Ms. Kennedy asked if this meant they were scheduling or just “hoping to schedule.” Mr. Domelowicz responded “hoping to schedule.” He said even if they didn’t have Town Meeting, Hamilton would have to hold the election. Ms. Dale said she was fine with the Save the Date.

Board members discussed how to get the word out. Mr. Domelowicz recommended the two towns’ websites and social media. Mr. Ansaldi inquired about issuing a press release. However, Mr. Wilhelm thought it premature at this point because people would put the dates on their calendars as official dates and it could cause confusion if they had to be rescheduled.

Ms. Dale noted Hamilton’s bylaw says once Town Meeting takes place, the election must happen five days later. Mr. Wilhelm said the towns can hold their elections on different dates since Wenham doesn’t have such a bylaw.

Mr. Farrell asked if there were a way to hold the election but not ATM. Mr. Domelowicz said to modify the bylaw Hamilton would need a Special Act. He said there was some talk that Governor Charlie Baker may add legislation dealing with town elections, but it hasn’t happened. They will have to follow State law and have the election before the end of June. Ms. Dale said for now, Hamilton should go ahead with how it has been operating in the past.

Ms. Harrison said she doesn’t think it unreasonable to have a Save the Date for June 20 and 25; everything is tentative right now. However, she said things are more complicated in Wenham as there are five ballot questions regarding overrides and the budget is very much tied to the election. There was general agreement by the participants on having the Save the Dates with the understanding there could be a change depending on how the pandemic evolves. Mr. Farrell said they might want to wait a bit, though, to make the announcement.

Mr. Domelowicz mentioned he talked with Hamilton's Interim Town Clerk who suggested they could use absentee ballots for early voting to cut down on number of people at the polling place and number of poll workers needed. They will try to get as many people as possible to vote by mail.

Hamilton Town Moderator Bill Bowler joined the meeting. He said in a group for town moderators, many towns have been discussing holding town meetings outdoors, such as on a football field or at a drive-in theater. He suggested it might be a good idea to move some warrant items to the Special Town Meeting in the fall and only deal with the most essential items at ATM. Mr. Farrell suggested for a future agenda item that the BOS review and identify essential articles and those that can be pushed off. Mr. Domelowicz said capital articles can be taken off for now as they are adjusting the budget.

Discussion of FY'20 budget impacts from the COVID-19 response and what it means for operations this year

Mr. Domleowicz recognized Hamilton's Finance Director Marisa Batista and said she had made some budget estimates based on potential revenue reduction. Ms. Batista said they'd asked department heads for a list of essential purchases and areas where they could cut spending. While she can't predict how collections will end up, she expects the Town will be able to balance the FY'20 budget with the savings they are finding.

Mr. Wilhelm asked if Hamilton had a targeted amount or goal [for what the Town was trying to save]. She said they were looking at about \$500K. This is based on the Town collecting 92% of what's due, which would result in a \$500K shortfall. She said the Town was trying to be conservative and plan ahead. Mr. Wilhelm said if Wenham had a 10% shortfall, they would be looking at \$462K, and was surprised the two towns were so close in their calculations. Ms. Batista said Hamilton's number may be low and everything will be changing as more information becomes available. Mr. Domelowicz added that generally the Town collects about 98%; in 2008-09, it collected 96% (a 2% decrease), so they are predicting 92% for now, which is a low collection rate for Hamilton. Mr. Wilhelm said Wenham has the same concerns.

- **Discussion of JOINT PROGRAMS**

Mr. Hubbard introduced the topic of joint Hamilton-Wenham programs and said he had seen an email specifically regarding the Hamilton Wenham Library. Mr. Hubbard asked if furloughing employees was an option on the table. Mr. Wilhelm said they hadn't decided, but the Library had let go of some part-time employees at its own discretion. He said Wenham was looking at recommendations on ways to save money. He said the town had saved money last year, and he said the Wenham BOS was waiting for Mr. Ansaldi to get back to them with recommendations. Ms. Dale said her concern was they look for other

ways to cut rather than places where they have joint programs and she offered a few suggestions.

Mr. Domelowicz said this is a health crisis causing a financial crisis, and they don't want to hurt employees more than they already are. He said they want to get to the end of the fiscal year, which is another 10 weeks, and then go back in and "sharpen pencils." Ms. Kennedy agreed they should cut capital expenses way before they cut personnel. Ms. Kennedy said she also agreed with Ms. Dale that the Library was vital and it wouldn't be her first thing to cut. Ms. Dale said she was interested in hearing what the Wenham FinCom has to say. Mr. Wilhelm's reply was that Wenham's FinCom met last week. They are responsible for presenting the FY'21 budget and had a discussion, but there were no subsequent recommendations. Mr. Ansaldi said they didn't have a lot of time, but would be meeting on Wednesday to further deliberate.

Mr. Farrell asked the Wenham BOS if they had approved the upcoming budget. Mr. Wilhelm said it was the FinCom that recommended the warrant articles, but the Wenham BOS had not yet met to vote on them. Mr. Farrell asked if there would still be a two-article split. Mr. Wilhelm said he thought yes and that the number for the Town override and School overrides wouldn't be changing.

Discussion of the FY'21 Budget

Mr. Domelowicz said he, Mr. Ansaldi, Ms. Batista, Jackie Bresnahan [Wenham's Director of Administrative Services] and School Superintendent Dr. Julie Kukenberger had talked and were all well aware the situation has changed dramatically in last month to month in a half. Mr. Ansaldi said it remains to be seen what will happen. Wenham has already printed ballots and will need to have them reprinted.

Dr. Kukenberger said the Schools are providing online learning and a lot of students aren't getting the services they usually would be receiving if they were in school. They are tracking the budget closely and looking strategically, doing a cost-saving analysis and everything they can.

Ms. Harrison said she agreed they need to monitor FY'20 and wanted to mirror what Hamilton is doing regarding getting through the next couple of months by saving expenditures and maintaining personnel, but FY'21 needs to be looked at again since the appetite for overrides and debt exclusions may be significantly different at this point.

Dr. Kukenberger said while she agreed, what is the harm in asking since they know they can come back after the voters have had a chance to speak? Her worry would be in not presenting to the voters what the Schools need and what the impact would be.

Darcy Dale

Darcy Dale
Board of Selectmen Clerk

1 6-11-2020

Date