

HAMILTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN

MINUTES OF MEETING

Teleconference

December 7, 2020

Selectmen Present: Chair Shawn Farrell, William Olson, Darcy Dale, Rosemary Kennedy, and Jamie Knudsen

Town Manager: Joe Domelowicz Jr.

** This meeting was conducted via Zoom teleconference with all the above participants remaining in their homes.*

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Shawn Farrell called the Board of Selectmen (BOS) teleconference to order at 6:33 p.m. and took roll call. All five BOS members were present. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Board and Committee Openings

- Council on Aging—two openings
- Hamilton Historic District Commission—openings
- Zoning Board of Appeals—one opening
- Community Preservation Committee (CPC)—one opening
- Conservation Commission—opening
- Open Space and Recreation Committee—opening

Selectmen/Town Manager (TM) Reports

Jamie Knudsen had no report. He noted Hamilton Development Corporation (HDC) President Rick Mitchell was present online and could update them on the HDC if desired.

William Olson gave no report.

Rosemary Kennedy reported the Conservation Commission (ConCom) had a second site walk for 3 Arabian Way. She said the proponent of the single family development wants to be able to encroach on the setback and the ConCom was not ready to vote on that yet. She said it was interesting to go on the walk and understand the importance of wetland

boundaries. The Town is relying on the State statute, and that's why she believes working on the Town's wetlands bylaw is necessary.

Darcy Dale gave no report.

Mr. Farrell gave no report.

Town Manager Joseph Domelowicz Jr. gave a reminder of the reduced hours that Town Hall will be open to the public due to COVID-19, which are posted online. The new hours do not affect work hours for Town employees. He called the Selectmen's attention to a special page on the Town website regarding COVID-19 testing dates. Cares Act money is being used for the testing. He said he post the rest of his Town Manager report tomorrow. Mr. Farrell asked what type of test was being given; response was a PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test. Mr. Domelowicz said the Town wants to make sure those who need a test can get it, but it is reserved for those who are symptomatic or are traveling and need a test. There is some out-of-pocket cost.

Public Comment

Tosh Blake, 217 Sagamore St., said he sent a letter to the Town Manager and BOS regarding the Town's third-party flag raising policy. He wanted to make sure they received it. Mr. Farrell said yes and that the BOS would take up the matter at a future meeting. Mr. Blake asked whether the Human Rights Commission charge and finalized policy would be posted online; Mr. Farrell responded yes.

Mr. Farrell commented on recent power outages in Town and suggested the BOS check in with National Grid about its capital plans and use of what he called repeaters to stop outages from happening. He said a repeater was placed on Woodbury Street. About 1,600 people were affected by the outages. The problems are with the power line extending from Beverly to Ipswich. The BOS discussed parts of Town where the outages had occurred.

CONSENT AGENDA

- Approve Minutes of the Sept. 29, 2020 BOS Meeting

Decision:

Ms. Dale made a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Ms. Kennedy seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken with "ayes" from Ms. Kennedy, Ms. Dale, Mr. Knudsen, Mr. Olson, and Mr. Farrell, (5-0) unanimous.

AGENDA

COVID-19 Update—Health Board Discussion

Board of Health (BOH) Chair David Smith introduced new Director of Public Health Nursing Rachel Lee who introduced herself to the BOS. A Hamilton resident and nurse, formerly a school nurse, she has been helping with contact tracing since March. Her philosophy is that education and reinforcement of COVID-safety regulations are the best way to reduce the virus spread. Testing isn't enough without education on when to get tested and subsequent contact tracing, she said, and education isn't enough without testing capacity. She said Director of Planning & Inspections Patrick Reffett and Mr. Domelowicz were helping to hire more contact tracers. She said Hamilton's priority needs to be keeping kids safely in school.

Mr. Farrell said they have discussed mask usage, prevention, physical distancing, etc., but should talk more about the timing of when to get tested. Mr. Smith explained what happens when there is a positive case, how close contacts are identified, and what instructions are given. He said in the past few days, the quarantine time of 14 days had been shortened. He said the next part of the education campaign is to help everyone understand what is involved if someone becomes a close contact and where testing fits in.

Ms. Lee said she had a Word document that she sends out to people telling them what to do if they have COVID symptoms. The latest advice is that someone should be tested at Day 5 of their exposure, and if one has no symptoms, one can be out of quarantine by Day 7. She said if someone has symptoms or has been within six feet of someone who tested positive for more than a total of 10-15 minutes, that person should be tested. Mr. Farrell said this timeline was important information to get out to the public.

Ms. Lee said she had been working with Assistant to the Town Manager Pat Shannon to post COVID information to the website. Also, she had asked Chief Russell Stevens to assist in positively reinforcing good behavior among young people. For example, officers can hand out coupons that count toward high schoolers' required community service hours. Ms. Kennedy said she had noticed kids at the basketball courts wearing masks.

Ms. Lee supplied the latest COVID-19 numbers: 10 confirmed active cases and one probable case, a positive antigen test. Antigen tests are about 70% accurate so the Department of Public Health (DPH) considers them probable and then they are followed up with a PCR test. Mr. Smith said DPH data has shown that get-togethers in homes have been the major source of transmission. School transmission is just a tiny fraction of the total numbers.

Mr. Smith said he participated in meetings to advise the School Superintendent about what learning mode to consider. The team decided to go to fully remote for the week after Thanksgiving and then re-evaluate. At the BOH's most recent meeting, it was decided to return to the hybrid model. Toggling back and forth precipitated an outpouring of concern from parents. Mr. Smith said at its BOH meeting this Thursday, the BOH will consider a substantially revised matrix/guidance for the School Superintendent and, if approved, that will replace what has existed up until now.

Mr. Domelowicz said, with Ms. Lee and Mr. Shannon's help, the Town has been updating the public on recent COVID-19 information and posting signage. Mr. Smith applauded Ms. Lee's ideas. Mr. Farrell said information is ever-evolving and asked the public for its patience.

Town Hall Building Committee (THBC) Charge/Recap Special Election

Mr. Domelowicz said the vote count [regarding the debt exclusion special election for the Town Hall renovation] was 669 “no” votes to 461 “yes” votes, off by about 200. The turnout was a disappointing 19%. Ms. Dale said the Town Hall renovation was a process and it would take educating people to let them know the money can’t be used for other things, such as schools. Also, that already \$1.1M had been spent per Town Meeting votes over the last three years. She noted there aren’t any other long-term solutions. Right now, the Town has the availability of Pilgrim Hall at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS) for temporarily housing of Town employees and also the use of CPC grant money. She said \$10 a month was the effective rate to each taxpayer when you divide the cost of the Town Hall renovation and that the Town had debt rolling off its books (Miles River Middle School) in 2028, which would offset the \$10 cost.

Mr. Farrell brought up that some people misperceived there was a choice on funding the Town Hall or something else, such as a turf field. While that wasn’t the case, he said fundraising for a turf field would be easier than fundraising for the Town Hall.

Regarding the \$9M price tag, Ms. Kennedy said subtracting out the CPC grant and the \$1.1M already invested made the figure \$4.6M in reality. She said some people had thought building a new building might cost less than renovating the existing building, but that was not true. For one, they would not have the CPC grant money available if they embarked upon a new building. She said she learned from an experienced builder that a lot of new buildings come with structural defects whereas the Town Hall has been standing for 122 years and hadn’t required much major work over the years until now, so it is a strong building. She said the current building represents the Town’s history, strength, and sense of community, which means something and makes it worth preserving. She endorsed the BOS having the THBC continue its work and seeing if a future Town Meeting would approve the funds.

Ms. Dale stressed that ADA-access is important so everyone can do business at Town Hall.

Mr. Olson advocated doing a better job at identifying the problems with the existing building and breaking down the costs, as well as showing what other Towns are doing per square foot. He suggested creating a one-page summary of how the dollars are to be spent and informing people of the building’s deficiencies. He said there wasn’t any school project out there currently, so it wasn’t an either/or situation. He said many projects have required a couple of Town Meetings until they are approved.

Mr. Knudsen said he thought the BOS owed it to the Town citizens not to just assume they needed to be educated a little more. He said they needed to listen and take citizen views seriously. He said for many people, the issue wasn’t just about not spending that much money or not wanting their taxes raised. He said the pandemic has taught that we may be doing business in a new way in the future and thought a good dialogue with the public on that and other issues was needed. He noted another question for the BOS was how to

engage people to attend meetings to have that dialogue. Ms. Kennedy agreed. She said the good thing that came about was that people were asking questions.

Mr. Farrell said the BOS needs to think about next steps for the THBC and what changes they should make to the plan. He doesn't think they should just roll it back out in the spring, but rather need to gain a lesson from the no vote, readjust thoughts on scope and cost, and think creatively. He said it was tough to say they had to go back to the drawing board, but because of the vote, they needed to. He noted that much of the cost was for bringing the building up to code.

THBC Chair Mike Twomey said the THBC was disappointed in the vote and working to figure out what went wrong. He said there were many questions about the double stairs, but the underlying issue is money. He said there was fear about money being required for school projects coming up in the near future, which was a conflict in people's minds. He said the THBC received bids a week before Town Meeting and beat the budget by \$820K. He said they mitigated the upcharge by leaving the existing stairs intact and adding another stairway at the back of the building. He said the THBC had been charged to bring the project up to it being a warrant article, and now the THBC needed further direction from the BOS.

Mr. Olson said coming up with lists of the pros and cons of different options was needed.

Mr. Farrell said he thought there were two reasons people voted no: one was the tax increase and the other, a perceived competition with other projects. He suggested he and Mr. Twomey and perhaps a representative from the School Administration or School Committee sit down and have a conversation about working together. He suggested a Schools rep could make a statement that the funds were not in conflict and that the Town would have the ability to fund School projects later when debt rolls off the books. Ms. Dale disagreed on involving the School Committee, saying the Schools were a completely different entity that also involves Wenham residents and shouldn't tie in to how Hamilton makes its decision on its Town Hall. Mr. Farrell disagreed, saying he didn't see how it could hurt.

Mr. Mitchell thanked the THBC for the hundreds of hours of work. He said his sense was the Committee focused on the construction and costs, but there was no larger committee made up of different departments and different citizens to sell the project. He said he went the night of the election to the Rec Center and there wasn't anybody there from any Town committee to see what the vote was. That told him something was missing. He said there wasn't anybody who came to the Planning Board or other boards to educate them and build consensus. He said before they go off and talk with the School Committee, they needed to find out what the critical issues are and listen to what the public was saying.

Department of Public Works (DPW) Director Tim Olson said when Rockport was discussing a new DPW facility, it took about two to three years for it to pass, which happened after a woman in town who was a marketer took it upon herself to speak out. His concern is that the Schools don't have any projects in the pipeline currently and those projects are about

10 years out, but the public is being told there are projects to fund. Also, he was concerned that the current building isn't ADA-accessible and is structurally deficient. He said if the Town does work that involves more than 30% of the building's value, it triggers accessibility. If they put an elevator in, it triggers that they have to bring the building up to code with fire protection and sprinklers. He compared this project to the Patton Homestead. He said the Town can choose to do smaller projects to the building, but those costs add up and will hit a threshold. He discussed some of the various options the THBC had looked at.

Mr. Farrell asked if they wanted to keep the THBC together as a Committee to help with the process. He suggested meeting with all the stakeholders. Mr. Domelowicz said that when things don't go the way you want them to, it's good to step back and have more discussion about how to get from the position they are in now to where they want to go. He said the current building didn't have fire suppression and wasn't ADA-compliant. He thought it would be good to reach out to stakeholders and find out what people feel most committed to. They might need to talk with GCTS about utilizing some of its vacant space for temporary office space for the Town. He thought they should have those meetings and come back to the BOS with a recommendation on how to go forward.

Ms. Kennedy said that the Town had spent \$1.1M already. While she didn't want to rush things, she wanted them to be cognizant of that. Ms. Dale suggested seeing if they could get a bit more CPC money to help with the project, but she noted the cost of only about \$10 per month to the taxpayer was good in that it provided a lot for the money.

Mr. Farrell said he will meet with Mr. Twomey, Mr. [Tim] Olson, Mr. [William] Olson, and others and come back to the BOS with a plan. The building is in bad shape, he said, and if they keep deferring maintenance, they may have only another five or 10 years in the building. Mr. [William] Olson said that is why a list of all the things wrong with the building and what the costs are is needed. Ms. Kennedy said she wanted to see the THBC continue its work.

Mr. Farrell asked if the BOS needed to make a motion regarding meeting with other stakeholders or having the THBC remain intact until the BOS decides its next steps. Mr. Domelowicz said the THBC had fulfilled its charge and the BOS can vote to recharge the THBC in the future if it chooses. He said that as BOS Chair, Mr. Farrell, can meet with others as he likes.

Mr. Twomey noted there is a six- to eight-month window to reserve the current bids and keep the design team intact. After that, the design team can sign off to go to other projects. He said the THBC was willing to take direction on whatever it takes to engage people and get the project up and running. Mr. Farrell said he would hold the stakeholder meetings and get back to the BOS to share what was discussed and figure out how to involve the THBC. He thanked Mr. Twomey and Mr. [Tim] Olson for their work and the two left the meeting at 7:57 p.m.

Draft Budget Calendar for FY'22

Mr. Domelowicz displayed the budget calendar, which was in draft form. It had been sent to the BOS over the weekend and was not in the packet. He said the goal of the document was to lay out milestones and meeting dates going forward. He said they had offered two dates for presentation of the Town budget capital plan. He said past practice was having a Saturday morning budget meeting with the department heads. He gave the option of a Saturday morning meeting on Feb. 6 or having it be part of the regularly scheduled Monday night meeting on Feb. 1. Ms. Kennedy preferred Saturday morning meeting as did most of the other Selectmen. Mr. Domelowicz said it would probably be a Zoom meeting that he would set for Feb. 6. Mr. Farrell asked the Selectmen to each look over the calendar and let Mr. Domelowicz know if they had conflicts. The calendar covers dates up to Annual Town Meeting in May.

Town Manager Evaluation—Discussion

This document was sent out to the BOS on Saturday and was also not included in the packet. Mr. Farrell said he and Mr. Olson merged some of the questions that said the same thing. The Town Manager goals are not on the document now. Ms. Kennedy said she didn't remember the BOS updating the goals; rather they were continuing to work on the prior goals. Mr. Farrell said he would add the new goals to the document.

Mr. Olson explained the sections. He said they did not add anything, just organized it better. He said what was important were the columns to the right that said: Exceeds goals. Meets goals. Needs improvement. He said those would not be filled it with a number, just a checkmark. There are three columns for comments: accomplishments from the past year, specific growth requirements, and additional resources or direction required that could improve the performance. Mr. Olson also recommended that Mr. Domelowicz do a self-evaluation. Mr. Olson said the Selectmen could leave some things blank if they didn't have a comment to share on a specific item. He said he and Mr. Farrell were not going to edit comments, but rather, would combine them all. Mr. Farrell said the goal of the evaluation, besides reviewing how Mr. Domelowicz was doing, was having a conversation about some things they might not know. He thought everyone should follow up or have a conversation with Mr. Domelowicz to fill in the gaps. Mr. Olson confirmed Mr. Farrell was going to edit the document one more time to add in the current goals.

Ms. Dale asked for a due date. Mr. Farrell said once the document is given out, they will have two weeks to fill it out. Mr. Olson said the form is a living document and the BOS can always give suggestions on it.

Mr. Knudsen said Mr. Olson had previously sent out a different spreadsheet. Mr. Farrell explained that was a list of the new goals, which he would be adding in to the document they were currently looking at. Mr. Knudsen confirmed with Mr. Farrell that when he and Mr. Olson were saying they would be adding to the goals, they were talking about adding what is on the bottom of Sheet 1 to the current evaluation document.

Mr. Farrell said, as had been done in the past, the Selectmen might like to have pre- or post-review one-to-one conversations with Mr. Domelowicz prior to the public discussion. He said fairly shortly the BOS will need to talk about Mr. Domelowicz's contract so to keep that in mind also.

Mr. Domelowicz said he was looking forward to talking with them. He said that he thought self-evaluations were an important part of the process. He said his goal had been to implement reviews across the organization this year, but it had been placed on the back burner due to all that had happened this year (pandemic). He said it was important for people to be praised for what they do well and given guidance in the specific areas they need to work on.

Vote to Lift Water Ban

Mr. Domelowicz said Mr. [Tim] Olson had sent him an email with the actual request that he had forwarded to the BOS. He located the document and shared it onscreen. Mr. Farrell and Mr. Domelowicz read some of the language aloud.

Decision:

Ms. Dale made a motion that the BOS remove the water ban. Ms. Kennedy seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken with "ayes" from Ms. Kennedy, Ms. Dale, Mr. Knudsen, Mr. Olson, and Mr. Farrell, (5-0) unanimous.

Consideration of Topics for Discussion at Future BOS Meetings

- Joint Meeting with the Wenham BOS—The BOS had a discussion on when to schedule the meeting. There was a question on whether the BOS wanted to meet with Wenham on Tuesday evening and cancel its regular Monday meeting that week or meet as usual on Monday and then also on Tuesday (Jan. 4 and Jan. 5). Ms. Dale advocated having two regular-sized meetings instead of one long one. Ms. Kennedy agreed. Mr. Farrell said they still had time to think about it depending on what the BOS agenda load is for that week.
- 86 Meyer Road—Mr. Olson said there was a request to discuss the Meyer Road house that had been the subject of previous discussions by the BOS. Residents living near the house are concerned the construction project isn't finished yet. The house is no longer in violation of the abandoned and dilapidated-properties bylaw; it is close to final inspection and has a two-year building permit. Mr. Olson said the BOS may need to revisit the bylaw to improve upon it.
- Human Rights Commission roll-out—Mr. Olson mentioned having a public forum the beginning of the year. Mr. Farrell said that was something they had thought of, but it may change.

Ms. Kennedy said she had something she wanted to chat about and will reach out to Mr. Farrell on it.

