

HAMILTON BOARD OF SELECTMEN

MINUTES OF MEETING

Teleconference

March 1, 2021

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

Town Manager: Joe Domelowicz Jr.

Other Town Staff Present: Michellelee Carroll, Regional Human Resources Director

** 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 6:32 p.m. and took roll call. All BOS members were present. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

ANNOUNCEMENTS & BOARD OPENINGS

Board and Committee Openings

- Human Rights Commission—five openings
- Hamilton Historic District Commission (HHDC)—two openings
- Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA)—two openings
- Open Space Committee—two openings
- Planning Board—two associate openings
- Affordable Housing Trust—one opening effective April 15, 2021

Public Comment

None.

Selectmen/Town Manager (TM) Reports

William Olson reported the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) had started to detail a new zoning requirement that towns have a multi-residential zone within the half mile of the commuter rail station. The Town will need to start looking at how that affects its zoning bylaws.

Rosemary Kennedy opted to hold off on her report on the Town Hall Building Committee (THBC) until later in the meeting. Darcy Dale also deferred her report. Jamie Knudsen gave no report.

Mr. Farrell said site work for the cell tower behind Town Hall had begun.

Town Manager Joe Domelowicz Jr.'s TM report will be posted online. A few items he highlighted are that vaccinations are continuing in collaboration with the Ipswich Conley's Pharmacy. Concern was expressed that the State was no longer utilizing local Boards of Health for getting the vaccines out, favoring large vaccination sites instead. He said many people were not happy about that, preferring local options. The deadline for returning papers to the Town Clerk for Hamilton's election is March 18. He listed the open seats.

Mr. Farrell added he has a chairs meeting with Wenham and the School Committee to talk about the school budget tomorrow at 7 p.m.

Ms. Kennedy said on Sunday she participated in the vaccine clinic at the Recreation Center in which about 400 to 500 people were vaccinated. She praised the work of Fire Chief Ray Brunet and Public Health Nurse Rachel Lee.

AGENDA

Department Head Report—Fire Department Chief Ray Brunet

Chief Brunet started his report by describing a cardiac emergency in which a pulseless person was revived and all worked out well. He said COVID-19 was front and center this year, starting with having to acquire PPE (personal protection equipment), then setting up and working the testing sites, which were paid for with Cares Act funds, and now participating in vaccination efforts for first responders, homebound seniors, and seniors 75 and older. He detailed recent vaccination clinic stats and expressed he thinks it a mistake the State has decided to go with "super sites." He thanked Ms. Lee, Recreation Director Sean Timmons, and Librarian Kim Butler for moving everything to allow them to set up for the vaccination clinics. He noted this year, the Fire Department responded to 820 emergency calls, which is about 250 less than last year. He attributed it to COVID and said many people had chosen to handle emergencies on their own rather than go to the hospital. Throughout the pandemic, he said the Department had been able to continue with its training. None of Hamilton's fire personnel contracted COVID this whole time. He said recruitment and retention are usually an issue. Last year four fire fighters were hired and completed their certification (400 man hours). He noted Kenneth "Kirby" Brand's retirement and other changes in makeup of personnel. He said the department currently has five full-time fire-

fighters and 20 call firefighters and had added three EMTs. He discussed the condition, age, and use of all the trucks and apparatus.

Ms. Dale said her only comment was to say thank you. Mr. Farrell asked about hose inspections. Chief Brunet said he initiated hose inspections annually and there is money in next year's budget to replace some hose. He talked about equipment that had been purchased and equipment grants being currently pursued. Mr. Farrell asked about mutual aid calls to other area towns; Chief Brunet supplied some details. Mr. Farrell asked about the Beauport ambulance service relationship and Chief Brunet said they were within spec for response times.

CONSENT AGENDA

- Minutes from BOS Meeting on Jan. 5, 2021
- Minutes from BOS Meeting on Feb. 1, 2021

Decision:

Ms. Dale made a motion to approve the meeting minutes of Jan. 5 and Feb. 1, 2021. Ms. Kennedy seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was taken with "ayes" from Ms. Dale, Ms. Kennedy, Mr. Olson, Mr. Knudsen, and Mr. Farrell, (5-0) unanimous.

AGENDA

Amend Chapter 91 Vote—Discussion and Vote

Mr. Domelowicz presented a "housekeeping" issue: there had been an error made in the vote. It had been made for the wrong year. Consequently, a new motion was needed and language had been prepared.

Decision:

Ms. Dale made the motion *to amend the application criteria for the FY2022 Chapter 91 Senior Tax Exemption program, which was voted by the Board of Selectmen on Nov. 23, 2020, to establish the income limits as \$47,520 for a single filer and \$71,280 for a married couple. The filing deadline for applications for this program was Jan. 31, 2021 and that remains unchanged.* Ms. Kennedy seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was taken by Ms. Dale, Mr. Olson, Ms. Kennedy, Mr. Knudsen, and Mr. Farrell, (5-0) unanimous.

Annual Town Meeting Articles, Schedule—Discussion

Mr. Domelowicz presented the Budget Preparation and Meeting Schedule Fiscal Year 2021 (Remaining Dates), which was in the packets. He called attention to the closing of the warrant on March 15, which will be the time to determine if anything has to go on the ballot for the Annual Town Election. He reviewed the list of potential warrant articles included in the packet. He noted the solar PILOT for the library roof. He said the CPC had two requests: the Patton Park tennis court renovation at \$32K and Town Hall project \$3M-

\$3.5M bonding request. For the Chebacco Road paving project, he said the Town was seeking State approval to revise the Conservation Restriction (CR). The revision will allow the road to be paved and moved a bit away from the water area. The Town of Manchester will also be putting forth an article to grant an easement different from the ones they already have. Mr. Farrell asked the date of Manchester's Town Meeting; Mr. Domelowicz will find out. Mr. Domelowicz also noted the proposed CR at the Patton Homestead.

Ms. Kennedy asked a dollar amount for the library roof solar PILOT; Mr. Domelowicz said he would invite Energy Manager Vicky Masone to give a report at the next meeting. Ms. Dale inquired if there were a grant involved; Mr. Domelowicz said Ms. Masone can address that in her report also. Mr. Farrell asked if they can supply materials on the project to the BOS soon rather than waiting to include it in the next meeting packet.

Mr. Farrell asked for an update on the water studies. Mr. Domelowicz said the Water Enterprise Fund was at its max, but projects for the future had been recommended. The Capital Committee would like to undertake a project to identify alternative water sources to the Ipswich River Basin. He said it had been put through as a capital request, but he would like to see it as a separate request. Mr. Olson asked where the money would come from; Mr. Domelowicz responded free cash. Ms. Kennedy recommended postponing the water study until after the Master Plan was completed.

A discussion was held on pursuing an increase in the surcharge from 2% to 3% for the benefit of having substantially more Community Preservation Committee (CPC) funds for Town projects. However, it is a long process that would not help with immediate needs, such as for the Town Hall renovation. Because it would take at least a year to see the resulting funding increase, it was decided by the BOS that Mr. Domelowicz should remove the article from the list.

Town Hall Building Proposal—Discussion

THBC Chair Mike Twomey gave an update on plans for the "ask" at Annual Town Meeting (ATM). He said the THBC had a question about when it should go back out to bid. The THBC has its bid numbers from last fall. He said they have to add some escalation to that, but at the same time, they are looking at some cost savings by taking some of the contingency out and also asking the CPC for additional funding. He said they are trying to make it so the dollar amount would least affect the tax rate. He said the THBC was looking at a substantial reduction in the "ask" at ATM.

The question about when the project should be put out to bid—before Town Meeting, before Town vote or after the Town vote—was discussed. The current bid with the general contractor is good through May, but it unlikely the sub-contractors will want to absorb the additional costs of lumber and other materials trending up. Mr. Domelowicz gave details on the bidding and numbers received. He said if the THBC does a good job at finding some savings, it made sense to get it through Town Meeting on May 1 and then they would have several months before they needed to have a Town election. He said they could do a rebid closer to the date of the election in the fall. Mr. Olson warned against bidding fatigue on an

unapproved project. He said if it were an approved project, they would get better numbers and more people interested in bidding. Ms. Kennedy agreed with Mr. Olson, but Mr. Farrell disagreed and said holding the election in the fall would give them time to get the word out and urge supporters to show up to the polls. Mr. Farrell said waiting until the fall to have the vote, might help because the picture post-COVID might have improved by then. Mr. Olson said his only concern was that construction costs are trending up.

Ms. Dale said 30 years ago, the Town employees were given notice from the State to vacate the building due to it not being ADA-compliant and that is when the Town installed the "temporary" ramp on the side of the building. She said, pertaining to making the building fire-safe and ADA-compliant, the Town had to attend to its "own house." She asked Mr. Twomey for input. He said he agreed with what Mr. Domelowicz and Mr. Olson had said regarding bidder fatigue. He thought not sending it out to bid now was a good decision. He supported the idea of getting through Town Meeting without incurring the bidding costs, which are about \$20K, and getting the publicity out and people to the polls in the fall. Ms. Kennedy said it was a sensible choice to stay with the spring vote. Mr. Farrell said just for the summer's repairs, they would come close to triggering the number that would necessitate them having to upgrade everything. There isn't any other land that the Town can use if it wanted to build another building. Also, if the Town went that route, it wouldn't be able to leverage CPC money so the whole bill would come from the General Fund and the tax rate. Mr. Knudsen confirmed they would have the project on the warrant for ATM, but election wouldn't happen until STM. Mr. Twomey said it would be a judgment call on when the bidding would occur due to the construction costs. It was generally agreed they should get full approval and a fully funded project first before going out to bid. The warrant article would have wording with a "not to exceed" number.

Mr. Twomey said the THBC would carry the current bid numbers over to the Town Meeting. Mr. Olson said with the construction knowledge they have in Town, it can be figured out what the escalation will be. Mr. Twomey said he would attend the CPC meeting on March 11 to make the additional CPC funding request. Ms. Dale noted that every year since 2017, the Town has approved some aspect of this project. Mr. Twomey left the meeting.

Water Abatement for 275 Asbury St.—Discussion and Vote

Ms. Dale said she did not see a plumber's invoice in the abatement request. Mr. Knudsen said that is because the first abatement amount of the two-part request was voted on at the prior meeting and the first part included the invoice. The Town bylaw only allows for approving one abatement, not two, therefore the BOS was looking at whether it was reasonable to look at this. It was discussed that they might consider a three-month span over two billing periods. A question was asked about what the lag time between water use and when the resident sees the bill. It was decided by the BOS to postpone the vote until this and other information was known.

Decision:

Ms. Dale made a motion to table the vote on the two water abatement requests on the agenda until next week. Ms. Kennedy seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken with “ayes” from Mr. Olson, Ms. Dale, Ms. Kennedy, Mr. Knudsen, and Mr. Farrell, (5-0) unanimous.

Water Abatement for 110 Asbury St.—Discussion and Vote

Tabled as per above motion.

Department Head Evaluation Report and Employee Surveys—Discussion

This agenda item was taken out of order and moved ahead to accommodate Regional Human Resources Director Michellelee Carroll. The Department Heads’ and Division Managers’ Evaluation Report was shared onscreen. Mr. Farrell said he was going to be meeting with the department heads and managers on Thursday to see how they can improve the report in the future. Ms. Carroll said 9 people had offered reports; therefore, the highest points the TM could get was 45 and the lowest was 9. He received a 29.5. Improving lines of communications was flagged as a needed goal. Ms. Carroll said she had summarized the responses received.

Mr. Farrell noted there were similarities between this evaluation and the one recently done by the BOS. He said there wasn’t anything glaring in either that needed attention. He commented on the “unique year” in light of the pandemic. He said the TM evaluation done by the BOS was different from the one done by the department heads. He wanted to see the two merged in the future with only relevant questions asked. Mr. Knudsen asked if there was any way to follow up and get some context to some of the comments. Mr. Farrell acknowledged context was one thing, but said there are many varied opinions and perceptions on how something might be, so he thought the summary was best.

Ms. Dale said she was doing the percentages: 26.5 divided by 45 and then multiplied by 100 gave the score. Ms. Carroll said people had been hesitant to put things in writing, but nobody had anything really bad to say. She said she felt the strengths and weaknesses given for the TM on the evaluations were consistent across the board.

Mr. Olson reiterated he isn’t a fan of giving numbers and preferred comments for noting changes or improvements to take action on. Ms. Carroll cautioned, though, that one person could give a 1 and another person could offer a 5, but both could have the same comment, so she favored including both the numbers and comments.

The BOS was asked to look over the evaluation and flag anything they thought worth having a conversation with Mr. Domelowicz about. If anyone had suggestions for improvement to the document, they were invited to send them to Ms. Carroll or Mr. Farrell.

Ms. Carroll is also working on an Employee Engagement Survey with a comment section and scoring section that was not to be anonymous. She said she would like to make it mandatory everyone participate. Mr. Farrell said the purpose was to bring positive change

and better morale. Mr. Knudsen asked Ms. Carroll what she needed from the BOS pertaining to the Engagement Survey and she said comments on the format or questions they might want to have added.

Human Rights Forum, March 4, 2021—Discussion

Mr. Knudsen said the forum planning committee had met. It was decided that at the forum, there will be a brief discussion on the Commission's history by Mr. Farrell and potentially Police Chief Russell Stevens. Mr. Domelowicz would also provide background on it. Then a few panelists would share their perspectives based on personal experiences. Mr. Knudsen said while he thinks hearing personal stories will have an impact, there were some surprises to him, and he thought there had been a lack of proper vetting with one of the choices in speakers. He thought it important that someone who is put forth by the Town as a presenter at the forum should be attuned to human rights, able to have a respectful dialogue, and have empathy about why some might feel vulnerable or threatened.

Ms. Dale suggested it will be an exercise in tolerance and said one can't push away people who have differing opinions. She said they want to reach out and open lines of communication to see if they can come to common ground, building on what is said and hearing each other. Mr. Olson said that was the purpose of the Commission, not the purpose of the forum. He agreed with Mr. Knudsen they should be bringing in subject matter experts.

Ms. Kennedy said they had invited three diverse speakers to talk about issues important to them that had an impact on their lives. Mr. Olson said offensive Facebook posts had appeared and they need to have a clear idea about what the forum was about.

Mr. Knudsen said the forum would be 1½ hours. There is a pre-forum meeting scheduled for Wednesday to talk in more detail. The moderator is Joe Borsellino, a civil rights attorney who helped form the Human Rights Commission in Dedham. He has managed and mediated many discussions on these topics. Steve Harrington, executive director of the North Shore Alliance of LGBTQ+ Youth (NAGLY), who works with students, will talk about experiences he is aware of in Town.

Mr. Domelowicz revealed a personal story about something that had happened to him personally during his vetting as Town Manager. He also talked about a situation in another Town where a waiter had overheard a selectman in conversation and reported on it on social media, causing a campaign to try to run the person out of office. Ms. Dale expressed hope the group will be responsible and careful with how it characterize families and not make assumptions that can have serious consequences. She said they owed it to themselves to give people the opportunity to tell their story and to listen with an open mind.

Mr. Knudsen said he totally favors diving in deep with conversations in appropriate context with people with whom he disagrees, but that is a different question from whether the Town should put a speaker on a pedestal who has no demonstrated commitment to human rights.

Anna Siedzik, one of the originators of the idea for the Human Rights Commission, said her concerns were about the process and structure. She didn't like what she considered "tokenism examples," i.e., black person, gay person, senior citizen, etc. It was brought up that the speakers would be speaking from personal experience and not representing any group. She didn't think it right to elevate any individual residents' opinions over others. Mr. Olson countered they weren't elevating anyone. Ms. Kennedy agreed, saying it was just a random representation due to a finite time span.

Hamilton resident Tosh Blake, 217 Sagamore St., asked if the forum would be posted on YouTube for viewing later; the response was yes. Ms. Kennedy said there would be a Zoom link on the Town website and Facebook page. The forum will be on March 4 at 6:30 p.m.

Adjournment

Decision 1:

Ms. Dale made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:52 p.m. Ms. Kennedy seconded the motion.

Further Discussion

Mr. Olson asked if the BOS might write a formal letter to the School Committee asking them to reduce the budget by 1%. Mr. Farrell said he would hold up on that until after his meeting with the School Committee tomorrow, March 2. Mr. Domelowicz said the School Committee is taking its vote on the budget on March 10 so the letter should be written prior to March 10. He suggested the BOS give Mr. Farrell authorization to write the letter. Ms. Kennedy suggested he write the letter if necessary, send it out to the BOS for comments, and have them respond back to him.

Decision 2:

Mr. Olson made a motion that the BOS authorize Mr. Farrell as Chair to write a letter to the School Committee with a formal ask to reduce the budget by 1%. Ms. Dale seconded the motion. A roll-call vote was taken with "ayes" from Mr. Olson, Ms. Dale, Mr. Knudsen, Ms. Kennedy, and Mr. Farrell, (5-0) unanimous.

Further Discussion:

School Committee Member Anna Siedzik added that the School Committee meeting on March 10 is a public hearing and the public will be invited to speak during the first part of the meeting. Then a vote on the budget will be taken. If it fails, there is one more week before the certification deadline.

School Committee Chair Michelle Bailey had joined the call, but said she did not have anything to add.

NEW BUSINESS

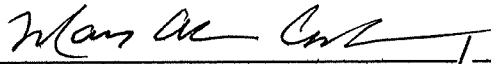
Consideration of Topics for Discussion at Future BOS Meetings

None discussed.


Decision 1 (Continued):

A roll-call vote on the adjournment was taken with "ayes" from Mr. Olson, Ms. Dale, Ms. Kennedy, Mr. Knudsen, and Mr. Farrell, (5-0) unanimous. Meeting ended at 8:56 p.m.

Prepared by:

 4-7-2021
Mary Alice Cookson Date
Minutes Secretary

Attest:

 4/7/21
Jamie Knudsen Date
Board of Selectmen Clerk

Documents Discussed at Meeting:

- Minutes from BOS meeting on Jan. 5, 2021 and Feb. 1, 2021, Mary Alice Cookson
- Proposed Motion on Chapter 91
- Spring Annual Town Meeting potential warrant articles list
- Budget preparation and meeting schedule
- Water abatement applications for 275 Asbury St. and 110 Asbury St.
- Community Conversation announcement for forum regarding the forming of the Human Rights Commission
- Department Head Evaluation Report and Employee Surveys
- Rough draft of Town of Hamilton Engagement Survey 2021, Michellelee Carroll

1880-1881

1882-1883

1884-1885

1886-1887

1888-1889

1890-1891

1892-1893

1894-1895