

Tuesday, March 8, 2022
Hanson Board of Selectmen
Selectmen's meeting room, Town Hall
Open Session

Members Present: James Hickey, Hanson BOS; Kenny Mitchell, Hanson BOS Vice Chairman; Laura FitzGerald-Kemmett, Hanson BOS; Joseph Weeks, Hanson BOS; Carl F. Kowalski, Whitman BOS Chairman; Daniel L. Salvucci, Whitman BOS Vice Chairman; Brian J. Bezanson, Whitman BOS Clerk; Randy Lamattina, Whitman BOS; Justin Evans, Whitman BOS

Members Absent: Matthew Dyer, Hanson BOS Chairman

Others Present: Lisa Green, Esq, Hanson Town Administrator; Lincoln Heineman, Whitman Town Administrator; Lucia Silveira, Hanson Executive Assistant; Christopher Howard, School Board Chairman; Christopher Scriven, School Board Vice Chair; Beth Stafford, School Board; David Forth, School Board, Fred Small, School Board; Michael Jones, School Board (Unsure if in attendance); Steven Bois, School Board; Dawn Byers, School Board; Hillary Kniffen, School Board (Unsure if in attendance); Michelle Bourgelas, School Board

I CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Kowalski called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance followed by a moment of silence for the people of Ukraine.

II FISCAL YEAR 2023 WHRSD BUDGET AND LONGE RANGE REGIONAL DISTRICT FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

Chairman Kowalski mentioned that he had a discussion with Chairman Dyer regarding meeting objectives for this joint meeting. Mr. Kowalski and Mr. Dyer agreed that the goal for this meeting is for the Whitman and Hanson Board of Selectmen is to meet and discuss the FY23 WHRSD budget as well as the long range regional district sustainability. Mr. Kowalski said that he sees this meeting as a way to give advice to the schools regarding certification. The Whitman and Hanson Board of Selectmen might be able to give this year and over the next year.

Mr. Bezanson stated that for a couple of years the school has been delivering their budget according to the statutory deadline. The school would vote their budget and then present it to the Town of Whitman and the Town of Hanson. Mr. Bezanson believes that if those numbers are given earlier, balancing the Town's budgets would be easier. He further mentioned that the school assesses the budget late and then the two towns go back and forth. The Town of Whitman and the Town of Hanson are not on the same page as a result of the last assessment.

Whitman Town Administrator, Lincoln, stated that the original budget provided by Mr. Szymankiak would require the use of one-time revenue (free cash) to fund that assessment number. The projected numbers discussed on February 16th by the school board changes the picture a bit. With those projected figures, Mr. Heineman, believes it would work for the Town of Whitman without the use of one-time revenue.

Hanson Town Administrator, Lisa Green, stated that when she and the Town Accountant were working on the preliminary budget, they ran numbers based on placeholders of 3.5%, 3.25% and 4.0%. They both believed that the Town of Hanson would be comfortable with a 3.0% assessment. The school assessment came in at 5.76% then it was rounded down to 3.7%. Ms. Green mentioned that the tuition free full day kindergarten is a \$740,000.00. When this tuition free full day kindergarten was presented a few year back, it was around \$300,000.00 to \$400,000.00 range. \$740,000.00 is a large amount for the Towns to absorb. As a result of COVID, there's been a shortfall of revenue growth. Hanson cannot afford a 5.76% assessment. Ms. Green is hoping that the school will bring their assessment figures down, so that one-times aren't being used. Ms. Green further emphasizes that the Town of Hanson does not want to decimate Town Departments as a result of the larger assessment numbers.

After being asked about what assessment the Towns feel they can handle, Ms. Green stated that the Town of Hanson would be comfortable with a 3% increase. Mr. Heineman said that a 3.76% increase would be a comfortable assessment number for the Town of Whitman.

Mr. Lamattina stated that this budget would be disastrous for both towns. He further emphasized that in order to have a partnership, we need good partnership. Mr. Weeks thanked everyone for attending this meeting. He also thanked the school board for putting this meeting together. Mr. Weeks hopes that this is the start of a new tradition of partnership with more transparency. Mr. Howard interjected from the audience to make everyone aware that the school board did not put this meeting together. Mr. Howard also said that the school board was not included or invited to this meeting. Chairman Kowalski said the school board was invited. However, when Mr. Kowalski asked Mr. Heineman about a meeting invitation, Mr. Heineman said that a conversation was had, but no formal invitation was sent. Mr. Hickey asked Ms. Green if a formal invitation was sent. Ms. Green referenced only an email, but she did not send an invitation to the school board. Mr. Hickey then asked Mr. Heineman if he sent a meeting invitation to which Mr. Heineman said no. Mr. Hickey then said that he was under the impression that the school committee was invited to the meeting to participate. Mr. Hickey stated he is for the premise of this meeting for the future, but was against having this meeting now. Before excusing himself and walking out, Mr. Hickey stated that he was doing so because the citizens he represents on the school committee and others who are sitting there were not invited. After he walked out, members in the audience applauded.

Chris Howard went to podium to read an email between both chairs and Town Administrators that illustrated some confusion about the meeting's purpose. He referenced a part of the email where the school board posted the agenda with the sole agenda item of observing the joint meeting. He further emphasized that in communication is a big part any partnership. Mr. Howard ended by saying that the board is happy to have further dialogue, but they are not ready to have a joint discussion this evening.

After a lengthy debate about whether or not the school board was invited, the ambiguity of the agenda item, partnership and communicating more effectively, Mr. Weeks interjected and said that there needs to be an outline of expectations or adjournment. He stated that having another meeting with clear action items is what's needed. Most of the Board members agreed. Ms. Kemmett mentioned that she agrees with Mr. Weeks. She stated a process needs to be documented. She also stated that the three boards should have a meeting to discuss best practices going forward. A conceptual framework that is agreed by all is what's needed to avoid misunderstandings. Mr. Kowalski stated that despite the lengthy discussions about emails, the school board is now aware of what the towns can afford. He further explained that there is still time to work on the budget. Mr. Kowalski also pointed out that Mr. Syzmaniak doesn't have all the numbers until the governor's projections are out.

Mr. Kowalski concluded by saying that the three boards need to come together more often and actively communicate. A meeting should be set up after town meeting season is over. The hope is that it will be a smoother process for the three boards

Motion to adjourn by Ms. Kemmett, seconded by Mr. Weeks. 10-0

III ADJOURN

Respectfully submitted,

Lucia Silveira
Executive Assistant