



Tuesday, March 19, 2024
Hanson Select Board
Select Board Meeting Room, Town Hall
Open Session

Members Present: Laura FitzGerald-Kemmett, Joseph Weeks, Edwin Heal, Ann Rein, David George

Members Absent:

Others Present: Lisa Green, Town Administrator; Lynn McDowell, Executive Assistant; Eric Kinsherf, Town Accountant; Kevin Sullivan, Finance Committee; Sean Kain, Whitman Select Board member

I CALL TO ORDER

Ms. FitzGerald-Kemmett called the meeting to order.

II PUBLIC ANNOUNCEMENTS AND UPCOMING MEETINGS

Ms. Rein read the public announcements and upcoming meetings.

III NEW BUSINESS

1. Vote to reappoint Mary Mercier as Board of Registrar for a 3-year term, ending March 31, 2027

MOTION by Mr. Weeks, seconded by Ms. Rein, to reappoint Mary Mercier as Board of Registrar for a 3-year term, ending March 31, 2027. ***Voted 5 – 0***
Roll call –George-Aye; Rein-Aye; FitzGerald-Kemmett-Aye; Weeks -Aye; Heal-Aye

2. High Street Park Committee

Mr. Weeks reported that the committee, during its March 18, 2024 meeting, voted to approve the plan and forward to the Town Planner to ask the Planning Board to review and approve. The committee requested a symbolic vote of support from the Select Board.

Mr. Weeks noted the plan was previously presented during the August 29, 2023 Select Board meeting. The plan will be to do the work phases; all stages are still preliminary as it needs approval from several departments in Town Hall. He also anticipates further hearings to address abutters concerns.

The committee also voted to make any changes to the community garden. It is built into the plan with its current layout and will not be altered.

Mr. DeFrias suggested the committee add the plan to the Town's website.

Mr. Clemons reiterated Mr. Weeks comments, emphasizing the plan laying out the essentials for infrastructure. He stated the plan has been reviewed and approved by both Fire and Police. He also noted the committee will need professional assistance with design elements and layout.

The Select Board questioned, if the plan has not changed, what was the outcome to the planned walks and abutter feedback and comments. Mr. Weeks stated the plan has been approved not only by this Select Board, but previous iterations. Using the Planning Board, it will give the Town Planner formal approval to move forward and make any needed adjustments. Mr. DeFrias will be needed for any applications for grants.

The Board further questioned how the committee will prioritize. During its last meeting, the committee met with some architectural and landscape designers that provided great input. Mr. Clemons also noted, with input and resources, there will be a better idea of costs and priorities. The money, and decisions at Town Meeting, may lead to what is created first. The Select Board suggested starting with the playground and then build around.

Ms. Green reminded everyone there is an earmark of \$56,000. She would need a scope of work and budget to move forward. Mr. Weeks thanked the Board for its continued support.

MOTION by Mr. Weeks, seconded by Ms. Rein, to approve the High Street Park Committee moving the plan on the Planning Board. ***Voted 5 – 0***
Roll call –George-Aye; Rein-Aye; FitzGerald-Kemmett-Aye; Weeks -Aye; Heal-Aye

3. Relocation of Veterans Officer:

Ms. Green met with the Veterans' Officer and Council on Aging Director and all agreed it would be a better fit to relocate the Veterans office to the Council on Aging location.

Currently new office space is being built. Upon its completion he will move to that space. Ms. Green expects the transition to be within the next few weeks. There is also the Historical room in the Library that is available for short term use.

MOTION by Mr. Weeks, seconded by Ms. Rein, to relocate the Veterans' office from Town Hall to the Council on Aging. ***Voted 5 – 0***
Roll call –George-Aye; Rein-Aye; FitzGerald-Kemmett-Aye; Weeks -Aye; Heal-Aye

4. Approve request for Cranberry Council of Churches to use Cranberry Cove on March 31, 2024 Sunrise Service, beginning at 6:30am.

MOTION by Mr. Weeks, seconded by Ms. Rein, to approve the request for Cranberry Council of Churches to use Cranberry Cove on March 31, 2024 Sunrise Service, beginning at 6:30am. ***Voted 5 – 0***
Roll call –George-Aye; Rein-Aye; FitzGerald-Kemmett-Aye; Weeks -Aye; Heal-Aye

IV OLD BUSINESS

1. Discussion regarding possible school override

Ms. FitzGerald-Kemmett spoke with the chairs of Whitman Select Board and School Committee. Ms. Green forwarded the information that tomorrow the School is meeting to discuss its budget. She will have more information after that meeting. She shared with the respective chairs what the Board discussed previously, during Open Session, the hope the assessment will be lowered to a number that would be manageable for the Town, otherwise it would entertain a school related override. With Mr. Madden's presentation and note of a needed operations override for next year, the Board felt an override for this May would be within a very tight window. Town Hall would need to educate residents as to what is happening; scheduling of educational forums and cable discussions would be challenging.

Ms. Green and Mr. Kinsherf have been working together creating various budget scenarios. Ms. Green viewed last week's School budget meeting, noting the superintendent proposed various scenarios with different cuts. Mr. Kinsherf created budget scenarios based on those proposals, including the possible shortfall. They are meeting weekly to review any possible monies from unspent articles or line items as well as reviewing department budgets for additional savings. Ms. Green shared that the Building department will be on reduced hours the next few weeks due to staffing. This will provide residents an example of what may be happening going forward, if Town Hall needs to cut staff.

Mr. Kinsherf stated that anticipating the schools requesting a 5% increase, the Town will need to use Free Cash to fund the budget unless additional operation cuts occur. If the Board decides to use Free Cash, currently at \$1.4M, funds will be completely exhausted. However, if the schools chose to request in excess of that number, a school override may still be needed to cover the difference. For next year, he noted either an override or department cuts will need to happen.

For Town meeting, warrant articles requesting Free Cash totals \$396,000. Mr. Kinsherf believed the budget could still be balanced and articles funded. Mr. Kinsherf noted there are pockets of money that could be used for capital investments; Ms. Green identified some unused articles to be reappropriated. As it can only be used for capital, he suggested investing in building repair and improvement.

Town Hall would be living week to week. While the Board hopes that School agrees to drop its assessment to 5%, it asked Ms. Green what will happen if not. She stated staff will be reduced at Town Hall. However, she wanted more information before having the conversation with department heads.

While the Board felt it will be too rushed to do an override, it will wait to hear what happens with the School meeting tomorrow evening. Mr. Kinsherf stated there is Free Cash to cover, but it will not exist next year at this time. An operational override will be needed next year. For the next Select Board meeting, all information should be available to make a final decision. The Board stated it is a school override as the School, a department within the Town, chooses not to work within the budget parameters the Town provides.

The Board acknowledged the 5% was not a motion to approve; it was determined from Mr. Madden's projections in comparison to the Town of Whitman numbers. The Board initially offered 3.8%, as in previous years, but has not officially voted on any number yet. It wants to stretch the dollar while still providing a high level of services. It also acknowledged that Finance committee does a great job of reviewing and analyzing data it receives to provide the costs and benefits for the Board to make informed decisions.

Mr. Sullivan stated he agreed to the 5% number after reviewing preliminary numbers from his conversations with Town Accountant. And agreed it could be supported for one more year, understanding it includes spending all Free Cash, and holding off capital improvements needs. He stated the Town needs to incorporate Mr. Madden's recommendations going forward.

Mr. Sullivan also noted no funding for stabilization. He reminded the Select Board has the power to control the tax rate. The Finance committee has not voted for the override, but majority agreed with Mr. Madden's recommendation for next year's budget. He agreed the need for education and support for Town residents to best understand the process.

The Board questioned, if the school is viewed as any other department in the Town budget, how do other department compare. Mr. Kinsharf stated each varies, but generally are within a range of 3-4%. And the increases vary as to each department's needs. The Board would like a School representative or the Superintendent attend Select Board meetings to providing updates and addressing any concerns prior to finalizing budgets. It has been done in the past by previous superintendents. The past two years all requests to attend Select Board meetings were responded with there are school committee meetings and the Select Board can attend those instead. All department heads speak to the Board, as well each other, about anomalies in budget or staffing issues. While the Board does not expect the School to coordinate with other departments, it would like some direct communication.

Mr. Kain noted the Town of Whitman's Board of Selectmen's conversation was very similar. He wanted to attend tonight's meeting to listen and show support. He noted, when thinking of sustainability over time, the Plymouth County retirement fund line item will be a budget buster for the next five years. Then after that, it will drop off substantially. Mr. Kinsharf noted that towns are not funding OPEC. He suggested plan-wise, once the retirement assessments drop off, use the difference to fund OPEC.

2. May Annual/Special Town meeting warrant review
 - a. Special Town Meeting

All appeared to be in order except for Article 4. It needed to be updated from proposed by the Planning Board to proposed by the Community Preservation Committee.

- b. Annual Town Meeting

The Board reviewed all articles. It had some comments for the specific ones, noted below.

Article 4 – The Board would like the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeal first. Forward to both the Planning and Zoning. It noted while not many properties that would be covered, and it would increase property rates, the pitfalls are unknown. The article did not include specific land requirements; the Board would like it added.

Article 5 – Dr. Schellenger is investigating what the surrounding towns currently do. The Board thought this should be passed on the Plymouth County to oversee.

Article 6 – With an increase in fines, there will be stronger consequences.

Article 8 – As the previous Recreation Commission was renamed Camp Kiwanee Commission, there is no Recreation Commission in the Town of Hanson.

Article 9 – Tightening the timeframe, ensuring the petition is correctly included

Article 13 – This needs to be included in article 7, with notation in the Explanation. This article will be deleted

Article 29 – Ms. Green proposed increasing the meals tax to 1% from 0.75%, as it has been a very successful revenue stream for the Town. The Board would like to include historical and projected amounts.

Article 32 – For the anticipated reopening of the animal shelter, there will need to be some minor clean up and repairs.

Article 33 – Duplicate; to be deleted

Article 34 – Duplicate; to be deleted

Article 35 – Citizens' petition

The warrant does not have the budget as it is not yet completed.

The Board suggested creating an article similar to the bylaw related to all town departments need to record audio or video, to continue providing transparency. This bylaw would require all boards and committees – appointed and elected - to post agendas and minutes on the Town website. To enforce, when updating annual June reappointments, this list would include who is and who is not posting the required agendas and minutes. Ms. McDowell will create a draft and forward to Town Counsel for review.

At this point, there are no recommendations from the Finance Committee as it has not yet completed its review. The Select Board reviewed but will hold on recommendations until after the Finance Committee has offered its views.

V APPROVE OPEN SESSION MINUTES

- 1.** January 9, 2024 executive session
- 2.** January 23, 2024 executive session
- 3.** February 6, 2024 executive session
- 4.** February 13, 2024 executive session
- 5.** February 27, 2024 executive session

MOTION by Mr. Weeks, seconded by Ms. Rein, to approve the executive session meeting minutes and not release, as presented on the agenda. ***Voted 5 – 0***
Roll call –Rein-Aye; FitzGerald-Kemmett-Aye; Weeks -Aye; Heal-Aye

VI APPROVE ONE DAY LIQUOR LICENSES

1. 04/21/24 – 12:00pm – 4:00pm – Amanda Cain – Baby Shower
2. 07/13/24 – 2:00pm – 7:00pm – Nadia Golubov – Wedding
3. 09/07/24 – 5:00pm – 10:00pm – Daryl Ann Roccaforte – Party

MOTION by Mr. Weeks, seconded by Ms. Rein, to approve the one day liquor licenses as presented on the agenda. ***Voted 5 – 0***

Roll call –Rein-Aye; FitzGerald-Kemmett-Aye; Weeks -Aye; Heal-Aye

VII COMMITTEE UPDATES

1. Economic Development Committee

No update.

2. High Street Park Committee

The next two committee meeting are scheduled for April 1, 2024 and April 15, 2024 in the Select Board conference room.

3. Highway Committee

The committee is meeting in mid-April.

4. Maquan Reuse Committee

Ms. FitzGerald-Kemmett proposed putting the committee meetings on hold and host a public forum to address residents' concerns, wants and needs on the Maquan property, using Mr. DeFrias' plan as a starting point. This could provide two or three other options for the Board to review, then present the best option.

There have been comments on social media about selling the property. The Select Board voted not to sell as the offers received did not match the value of the property.

Ms. FitzGerald-Kemmett stated Community Preservation would cover the expenses related to all fields.

5. Recreation Commission

No update.

6. Whitman Hanson Regional School Agreement Committee

No update.

7. Other Committee updates

No other updates to report.

VIII TOWN ADMINISTRATOR REPORT

- Ms. Green shared the \$100,000 earmark for the waterpipe should be moving forward. However, the Select Board stated she should reach out to Old Colony as it recently removed this project from its queue.
- She attended a legislative meeting that provided some updates impacting municipalities, the FY25 budget, which included chapter 70 and transportation fundings, new cannabis host community agreement regulations, stormwater and wetlands protection as well as the Municipal Empowerment Act. She will watch these pieces of legislation for updated and the impact on municipalities.
- Select Board members Laura FitzGerald-Kemmett and Ed Heal joined Ms. Green and several department heads attended a Table Talk exercise at the Fire Station. It was coordinated by Fire Chief O'Brien and the Massachusetts Maritime Academy cadets. The exercises focused on weather related scenarios that could affect Town Hall, requiring moving Town Hall operations, IT scenarios and Rte 58 roadway weather scenarios. She noted that much was learned at the exercises today but much work still needs to be done to be prepared for extreme weather events. She thanked Chief O'Brien and the Massachusetts Maritime Academy cadets for organizing the workshops.
- She noted the Select Board office is working on the budget and Town Meeting warrants. The Whitman Hanson Regional School District School Committee is scheduled to vote the town assessments during the Wednesday, March 20 meeting, beginning at 6:30pm. She will be in attendance.
- The Building department will be on reduced hours the next few weeks due to staffing. Please check with the Town's website and Facebook for department hours, or call before coming to Town Hall, as Mr. Glass may be out for inspections. The Building department phone number is 781-293-5503.

IX ADJOURNMENT

MOTION by Mr. Weeks, seconded by Ms. Rein, to adjourn to Wage and Personnel, then to Executive Session. **Voted 5 – 0**

Roll call –George-Aye; Rein-Aye; FitzGerald-Kemmett-Aye; Weeks -Aye; Heal-Aye

Respectfully submitted,

Lynn McDowell