

Board of Selectmen
Regular Meeting Minutes
May 10, 2021, 7PM

Present: Chair Keyes, Selectman Arcudi, Town Administrator Schindler, Executive Assistant Lindsay Mercier.

Chair Keyes called the meeting to order at 7:00PM. Chair Keyes began the meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Consent Items

Accept the \$5,000 Donation from the Seven Hills Foundation to the Hopedale Fire Department for a portable suction unit and two (one for each ambulance) video laryngoscopes used for difficult intubation.

Chair Keyes stated that there is a letter provided by Seven Hills Foundation, Bill Stock in the packet. The letter was shared to the meeting screen. Keyes thanked the Seven Hills Foundation for their generosity to the Hopedale Fire Department. Chair Keyes mentioned that the Seven Hills Foundation makes annual donations, and the Town appreciates their generosity.

Selectman Arcudi made a motion to accept the \$5,000 donation from the Seven Hills Foundation to the Hopedale Fire Department for a portable suction unit and two (one for each ambulance) video laryngoscopes used for difficult intubation. Chair Keyes seconded the motion.

Arcudi – Aye, Keyes – Aye

Accept the Donation from the Reilly Family to cover legal fees associated with the legal fight for the Town's Chapter 61 right to the West Street Property, donating \$10,000 for Hopedale Public Schools, \$10,000 for Hopedale Fire Department, \$10,000 for Hopedale Police Department (see letter attached).

Chair Keyes stated that he and Town Administrator Schindler has been corresponding with Attorney Brian Riley with KP Law. Keyes wanted guidance regarding any liability and ethical issues with accepting this donation because of current litigation from the person giving the donation. Keyes stated that Attorney Riley informed him that anyone can donate to these three important and critical departments. Keyes stated that the language of the letter is what makes him uncomfortable accepting, because the language is to "off set legal fees" which is caused by the ongoing litigation from the person offering the donation. Keyes stated that he would feel more comfortable accepting the donation with a three-person board (full board) or if the language was changed. Selectman Arcudi stated that the Town can only accept \$20,000 because of the Town's charter, the Town is not allowed to receive/accept money for the schools. Arcudi stated that the letter will need to be rewritten to state only Fire and Police and adding Schools to another letter. Arcudi stated that he is comfortable to move this item to another meeting so it can be discussed with a three-person board if that is what Chair Keyes is comfortable with. Arcudi stated that he would be comfortable with a motion that does not state "off setting legal fees" instead the motion would be to "accept the donation to the Fire Department and Police Department" and not tie it to a particular reason. Keyes and Arcudi both stated that this donation is incredibly generous and that the Departments receiving the donation are very thankful. Keyes asked to pass this item over for the time being, not include the letter and reword the motion of the donation from the Reilly family to Police and Fire. There will be a board of three when this item is revisited. Arcudi asked Town Administrator Schindler to work with the donor to word the letter per their requests. Arcudi asked Town Administrator Schindler to get clarification if these donations are going directly to Police and Fire's operating budgets, not for a specific reason/budget.

Selectman Arcudi made a motion to table this item until there is a three-person Board of Selectmen. Chair Keyes seconded the motion.
Arcudi – Aye, Keyes – Aye

Appointments and Resignations

Appointment of Megan Piatt to the Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee, Effective May 10, 2021 (Talent Bank Attached)

Chair Keyes thanked Megan Piatt for her interesting in the Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee and volunteering her time and efforts. Keyes stated that he is excited for this committee to start. Selectman Arcudi echoed Chair Keyes sentiments.

Selectman Arcudi made a motion to appoint Megan Piatt to the Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee, unexpired term, effective May 10, 2021. Chair Keyes seconded the motion.

Arcudi – Aye, Keyes – Aye

New Business

Approve Contract for Deputy Fire Chief (Vote):

Town Administrator Schindler informed the Board of Selectmen that the contract in tonight's meeting packet includes the revisions that were agreed upon and both parties (BOS and Fire Deputy Chief) agree to the contract. Selectman Arcudi stated that in executive session they have walked through this contract and regarding the revisions, nothing fundamentally was changed. Chair Keyes stated that he is comfortable with this contract. Selectman Arcudi thanked the Fire Deputy Chief for his patience with this and being so gracious and professional. Chair Keyes echoed Selectman Arcudi's sentiments.

Selectman Arcudi made a motion to approve the Deputy Fire Chief Contract. Chair Keyes seconded the motion.

Arcudi – Aye, Keyes – Aye

Joint Meeting with Finance Committee

Update & Finalize re: FY22 Budget and Articles (Vote)

Review Annual Town Warrant 2021 & TM Presentation (Vote)

Finance Committee Present: Elizabeth Callahan, Dennis Madigan, Ken Wilson, Patrick Maloney, Chris Hodgen's Jr. Chair. Chair Hodgen's opened the joint meeting with the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee at 7:22PM.

Chair Hodgen's stated that one of the major changes to the FY22 budget workbook draft since their last meeting was updating the estimate for cannabis retail sales. Chair Keyes stated that there is an opportunity to still exceed that number that was provided regarding cannabis retail sales. Regarding the remaining contracts that are being negotiated, the Finance Committee is thinking to increase those budget lines as an estimate. This change will be reflected in the updated FY22 budget draft. Chair Hodgen's went over additional budget lines throughout the FY22 workbook draft.

Chair Hodgen's asked the boards if they would want to use free cash in the operational budget now or do they want to not use the free cash and put it in stabilization in the event that a debt exclusion vote fails. Chair Keyes asked Chair Hodgen's to explain to the public the difference between an override and a debt exclusion. Chair Hodgen's stated that the main difference a proposition 2 ½ override is that the amount is added to the levy, and it does not "fall off" meaning it remains in the levy calculation on a go forward basis. Whereas a debt exclusion "sits on top" of the levy until the debt is paid off. Selectman Arcudi stated that if the Town implements a debt exclusion of \$288,000 which would begin next year (FY23) and go until the year 2030. Essentially the \$288,000 would decrease to \$214,00 by 2030 (7 years). By then, based upon revenues and other items we are anticipating from cannabis, as these monies fall off, they would then be replaced with revenue. This is likely something that the Town residents would not pay from their taxes. However, if the Town takes the \$422,000 immediately next year the Town would have to find \$222,000 to make up in taxes. Chair Hodgen's agreed with Selectman Arcudi's statement adding that it is true as long as the Town does not take on additional debt. Chair Keyes mentioned that if residents see a tax bill increase it is not because of an override or debt exclusion, it is because their assessment will be up to value. Chair Keyes stated that the Assessors office is currently working on making sure all assessing is true to value. Chair Keyes stated that regarding traditional state funding it should be level funding, this is outside of any COVID related funding. Chair Hodgen's stated that he believes the state funding has marginally increased (by a %). Chair Hodgen's stated that in the FY22 workbook draft, the free cash is entered but the debt exclusion is not. This is to see if the Town would have free cash if the debt exclusion failed. The free cash would then go to stabilization. Chair Keyes stated that the Town should not want to liquidate our free cash. Chair Hodgen's feels that it is best practice to use free cash for capital one-time items or stabilization, not necessarily operation. Selectman Arcudi stated that there are certain items in the capital budget that could be put into the operating budget that could be financed. The Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee would have to look through each line item to determine this. Selectman Arcudi stated that he would feel disappointed if the Town could potentially fund certain items but does not take the time now to find out what they are, especially regarding public safety spending. Chair Hodgen's stated that the debt exclusion will allow the Town to purchase some of the items discussed that the Town originally wasn't able to. Town Administrator Schindler stated that there is still time to work on the FY22 budget however, the warrant for Town Meeting needs to be completed as soon as possible. Schindler stated that the warrant needs to be posted by Friday. Chair Hodgen's confirmed with Town Administrator Schindler that the Finance Committee needs to provide her a recommendation on the projects to exclude, the FY22 workbook once completed and the movement to stabilization. Selectman Arcudi stated that he is able to work with Chair Hodgen's to create the math of how much needs to be moved into stabilization minus what the Finance Committee is excluding to come up with the \$288,000. Town Administrator stated that she will work on the three articles discussed during this meeting, the debt exclusion, free cash, transfer to stabilization/capital.

Patrick Maloney made a motion to end the joint meeting with the Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen. Elizabeth Callahan seconded the motion.

Callahan – Aye, Maloney – Aye, Madigan – Aye, Wilson – Aye, Hodgens – Aye

Old Business

COVID Update re Reopening Town Hall; Library; COA

Town Administrator Schindler stated that the Library Director, Robyn York has created a reopening plan with the Health Agent aiming for reopening on June 1st. Schindler has created a plan as well for Town Hall reopening aiming for June 1st. The hours of operation have not been set as of yet. Schindler is working on additional information for the public. Carole Mullen from the COA spoke to the Board and let them know that she is also working with the Health Agent regarding reopening. Mullen confirmed that the COA is open by appointment currently.

Public and Board Member Comments (votes will not be taken)

Carole Mullen asked the Board and the Town Administrator if updating the contracts for non-union employees is a priority for the Board. Town Administrator Schindler stated that she is working on updating the COLA and “steps” for the Town employees. It is a priority for the Board and Town Administrator, but certain items need to be completed before Schindler can take on another project.

Correspondence and Selectmen Informational Items (votes will not be taken)

Becca Solomon, Chair of the Hopedale Conservation Commission has completed eight units of the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions (MACC) Fundamentals for Massachusetts Conservation Commissioners training program and has received a certificate of achievement (see letter attached).

Chair Keyes and Selectman Arcudi congratulated Becca Solomon on this achievement. The Board thanked her for her hard work and continued effort in advancing her knowledge.

Requests for Future Agenda Items:

Hopedale MVP Listening Session

Administrator Updates (In Packet)

Executive Session:

Chair Keyes read the purpose for executive session below.

For item # (3) To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation that an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigation position of the public body and the chair so declares, which he does. **Purpose: Collective Bargaining; Clerical, Public Works & Dispatch Units.**

Selectman Arcudi made a motion to move to executive session per the purpose that Chair Keyes read. Chair Keyes seconded the motion.

Arcudi – Aye, Keyes – Aye

Chair Keyes dissolved the meeting at 9:06PM

Submitted by:

Lindsay Mercier

Lindsay Mercier, Executive Assistant

Adopted: _____