

Hopedale Select Board  
Meeting Minutes  
Monday November 27, 2023  
Draper Room 6:30 p.m.

Meeting called at order at 6:30 p.m.

In attendance: Chair Hazard, Mr. Stock, Mr. Savage, and Town Administrator Ruscitti

A. Consent Items

1. Review/Approve meeting minutes of 2/13/2023: Motion made by Mr. Stock and seconded by Mr. Savage.

Stock- Aye Savage- Aye Hazard- Aye

B. Appointments & Resignations

1. Accept Tracey Phillips resignation from Community Preservation Committee, effective November 20, 2023: motion made by Mr. Savage and seconded by Chair Hazard. Mr. Stock asked if the board could put this off for another meeting so that they can talk with Ms. Phillips and determine if she would consider staying on the committee.

Mr. Savage and Chair Hazard agreed, and they rescinded their motion and second, respectively.

C. New Business

1. Annual Licensing

a. Class I and II: Both these applications have been submitted to the Administration office and are complete.

a. D.C. Bates (Class I): Motion made by Mr. Stock and seconded by Mr. Savage.

Stock- Aye Savage-Aye Hazard-Aye

b. Lord & Son (Class II): Motion made by Mr. Stock and seconded by Mr. Savage.

Stock- Aye Savage-Aye Hazard-Aye

2. Discussion/possible approval and execution of contract with Colliers for Owner's Project Management services for the Junior-Senior High School roof project. Mr. Ruscitti explained that the Owners Project Management (OPM) services went out to bid and 3 companies submitted qualifications. After vetting by the review team, Colliers was selected. Negotiation has been completed and the overall cost for OPM services is \$90,000. The total project cost is estimated at \$1.8 million, for which borrowing was approved at the May 16, 2023 Town Meeting. Colliers has a great deal of experience providing OPM services for school projects, and specifically roof projects. Colliers does reserve the right to propose a cost increase if warranted. A summary of relevant work experience of Colliers personnel who will be involved is included in their submission. Mr. Ruscitti noted that Colliers was very responsive to questions and concerns.

Motion made by Mr. Stock and seconded by Mr. Savage to execute the contract.

Stock- Aye Savage- Aye Hazard- Aye

3. Discussion surrounding current employee healthcare rates and future financial impacts. TA Ruscitti made a short presentation (which can be viewed on the town website). In working on the

Fiscal Year 2025 budget, the projected costs for employee and retiree health insurance are a significant concern. Currently, the Town contributes 80% of the cost of health insurance with the employee/retiree contributing 20%. We have been advised to expect a 12% increase in health insurance costs next year, or about \$400K. By FY 29 the total cost would be about \$7 million; at current contribution rates the Town's share would be about \$5 million. A 70% Town/30% employee split – which is the industry standard – would save about \$3.5Mil over the same 5-year period. It is numerically evident that the community could be asked for another Proposition 2 ½ Override by year 2. These issues are being brought to attention now, so it does not come as a surprise. Board members agreed that this is not sustainable.

D. Old Business: No Old business

E. Administrator Updates: A couple of issues occurred over the Thanksgiving break. A limb from a town-owned tree fell on a car. The family is OK, but the car was damaged. A meeting was held with the Police and Fire Chiefs, Highway Superintendent, and Tree Warden so we can identify and begin removing trees that are an imminent threat.

The Thanksgiving Gobble Wobble was well attended with a record turnout and a great community response. Thanks to New England Steak and Seafood and TDs that provided meals to our first responders who were working over Thanksgiving.

F. Public and Board Member Comments (votes will not be taken) Mr. Savage thanked the Hopedale Police and Fire Departments for a great Gobble Wobble. He also took part in the Toys for Tots collection on Saturday accepting donations. Donations are down this year – if anyone is looking to donate there are drop boxes at the Police Station. The Winter Stroll is Saturday from 10 a.m. – 6 p.m. and it is a great community event; they are also including shuttle service this year. Chair Hazard hopes to see everyone at the Winter Stroll. She continued and provided an update regarding the Grafton-Upton railroad litigation. The Surface Transportation Board ruling was not favorable to the Town. An update from Anderson Krieger was read and can be listened to on the meeting recording available on the Town website. The land court case will be heard on January 9, 2024.

G. Requests for Future Agenda Items Mr. Savage would like an inventory of all town owned property, intended use and future intention. He would also like to continue discussion regarding Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School.

H. Correspondence and Select Board Informational Items (votes will not be taken) Can be viewed in the meeting packet.

I Executive Session:

1. Move that the Board enter into executive session pursuant to Purpose 2, M.G.L. c. 30A, §21(a)(2) to discuss strategy with respect to negotiations with non-union personnel (Treasurer/Collector)
2. Move that the Board enter into executive session pursuant to Purpose 2, M.G.L. c. 30A, §21(a)(3) to discuss strategy with respect to litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the Chair so declares.

Motion made by Chair Hazard to move into Executive Session, to return to open session if the contract with the Treasurer/Collector is settled. Seconded by Mr. Stock.

Stock- Aye Savage- Aye Hazard- Aye Executive Session entered at 7:31pm

The Board returned to Open Session at 7:55pm

Chair Hazard stated that the board did come to an agreement on the Treasurer/Collector contract. Motion made by Mr. Stock and seconded by Mr. Savage to enter into a contract with Thomas Merolli effective 11/27/2023, with his start date of 12/18/2023.

Motion made by Mr. Stock and seconded by Mr. Savage to adjourn.

Stock- Aye Savage- Aye Hazard- Aye

Meeting Adjourned at 8:00pm

Respectfully Submitted: Kelly Grant  
Board Approved: 12/26/2023