

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Hopedale Town Hall-Draper Room
May 8, 2019
Regular Minutes

Present: Selectman Brian Keyes, Selectman Louis Arcudi, Selectman Thomas Wesley
Also, present, Town Administrator Steven Sette and Videographer Jeff Ellis.
Finance Committee members present, Colleen Strapponi, and Donald Comastra left the meeting at 7:10 p.m., and Sam Hockenbury arrived at 8:10 p.m. Finance Committee members Karla Hopkins and Derek Piatt were absent.

Meeting called to order at 6:30 p.m. by Selectman Arcudi.

Pledge of Allegiance

A. New Business

1. FY20 Budget Discussion with Finance Committee

The Board of Selectmen met with members of the Finance Committee (FinComm) to continue discussion on the FY20 Budget. Administrator Sette advised that the Town will need a FY20 override for approximately 429K to fund the operating budget to fund the Town Departments and Schools. Administrator Sette stressed that the override is to maintain level of services and not fund any capital improvements. He noted that revenues have decreased steadily over the last several years, looking to hopefully gain some additional revenue from projects the Board is working on. In the last few years, the Town has used free cash to fund the budget, however, this source of funding has been depleted, and therefore, an override is needed to maintain level services.

BOS Chair Arcudi noted the first item is discussion on the FY20 budget before voting the articles for inclusion on the warrant; the second part is to educate the taxpayer on the FY20 budget, so the voters are not hearing about an override for the first time at Town Meeting; and the third is to have an actual Town ballot vote.

FinComm Chair Sam Hockenbury commented that the overall understanding between the department heads, administrator, BOS and FinComm is that there is a revenue problem, not a spending problem. Therefore, in order to maintain services, the Town will need an operational override. There is no guarantee however, that another override will not be needed again next year. The budgets are tight with no slack to give. In terms of presenting information to the voters, the Boards have been meeting to ensure there is a plan. The process is for the Town to present the budget to Town Meeting voting on the budget and then on the override. Because an override is separate from Proposition 2 1/2, the override will need to also be voted at an election. Mr. Hockenbury noted a ballot vote would be done sometime in September when residents are back from vacation. The downside is the FY begins July 1, so the budget cycle will have already begun, so if the override fails, approximately 429K in cuts would need to be made mid-year.

Mr. Hockenbury's plan is to put the budget on the website with additional information that becomes available. Potential challenges on the budget include; public safety overtime. In the past, funding has come out of the reserve fund. This year the FinComm decreased the amount of money that is put into the reserve fund and reallocated it to public safety overtime line items. There is also a significant increase in Charter Schools costs that are passed on to Towns from the State. There is also a 21% increase in BVT (\$97,800). The Charter Schools and BVT are really non-negotiable budget items.

Chair Arcudi noted negotiated contracts for trash actually decreased even though the line item increased. His explanation is had the Town stayed with the same contractor; they would have seen a much larger increase. The Town Administrator also worked with Town employees and Unions on health insurance to get the same coverage but saved hundreds of thousands of dollars had the Town stayed with the same vendor.

Chairman Arcudi then opened discussion to members of the audience asking if there is something the Board is missing from an educational standpoint as residents that will be voting on the budget.

Question: What are the decreased revenues? FinComm Chair Sam Hockenbury responded, Town contributions to Charter schools' have increased; however, the State has not increased the amount given to the Towns to offset the costs. There are three funding sources for the budget, taxes, new growth and state aid. State aid has been relatively flat since the recession, which means the burden has to come from the other facets. New growth has not been growing at a high enough rate, leaving the burden on the local governments and ultimately hitting the taxpayers.

Selectman Keyes advised that the Board of Selectmen and other Boards have been diligently and aggressively have been for the last several years, laying a platform for more commercial businesses to come to Town.

Question: What is the expected tax rate increase? Administrator Sette advised, the average price of a home is \$346K. The yearly increase is approximately \$336.00 yearly on the average home. Without the override the average increase would be approximately a \$160.00 yearly on the average home.

Selectman Keyes explained that in prior years the Town was able to offset the budget by using free cash. Free cash increased because there a property that owed a large sum of taxes and was finally paid when the property was sold. That money went into free cash. Another source of the free cash came from departments not spending their entire budgets. At the end of the year, any monies left in department budgets are turned over to free cash. Over the past couple of years, this account has been used to help offset the overall budget. If there was another mechanism to fund the budget the Town would.

Question: What would happen if the override does not pass. How big are the challenges and what would be the outcome to the Town and Schools? Finance Chair Hockenbury explained the potential cuts to departments such as the Library will mean they will lose their certification. Losing their certification means they will lose their state aid, which is a double whammy. It also takes multiple years to get the certification back. The Police Department may have to close the Police Station at night and/or may have shifts where there is only one officer on duty, which is a high risk to the officers.

Finance Committee Chair Hockenbury said they will put together a sheet for Town meeting with different scenarios of cuts to educate the voters should the override not pass.

2. Discuss warrant articles for inclusion on May 21, 2019 Annual Town Meeting Warrant

Administrator Sette explained the order of the annual town meeting warrant articles advising that the warrant closes on May 10th. Selectman Arcudi announced the Annual Town Meeting is scheduled at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, May 21 in H.S. Dennett Auditorium. Board members urged residents to attend this very important meeting.

The Board reviewed the May 21, 2019 Annual Town Meeting Warrant

Chair Arcudi began by reading Article 22

“Article 22: To see if the Town will vote to approve funding, in the amount of \$100,000, related to achieving compliance with the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Phase 2 General Permit for Stormwater Discharges from Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4 Permit). Activities to be funded under this expenditure are intended to bring the Town into compliance with the Year 1 requirements of the MS4 Permit and include the following: Implementation Plan, Stormwater Management Plan, IDDE Plan, Stormwater Regulations Review, limited GIS mapping, Catchment Delineation/Ranking, Public Education, Employee Training, and Year 1 Annual Report.”

MSDV to approve placing Article 22 on the Town Meeting warrant.

Selectman Arcudi – Aye, Selectman Wesley – Aye, Selectman Keyes – Aye

Selectman Keyes read Article 21

“Article 21: To see if the Town will vote to amend Zoning Bylaw: Section 12.12, Non - Medical Marijuana Retailers Section 12.12, Non-Medical Marijuana Retailers. Marijuana retailers, as defined for purposes of G.L. c.94G, §1, shall be prohibited from locating and operating in the Town of Hopedale in any zone other than Industrial, Light Industrial, Commercial Special Permit required.”

MSDV to approve placing Article 21 on the Town Meeting warrant.

Selectman Arcudi – Aye, Selectman Wesley – Aye, Selectman Keyes – Aye

Selectman Wesley read Article 23

“Article 23: To see if the town will vote to raise and appropriate or transfer from available funds or borrow a sum of money, not to exceed \$250,000, to be spent under the jurisdiction of the Recreational Field Ad Hoc Committee, said sum to be utilized for purposes of preparing preliminary plans, specifications and estimates for the renovation and reconstruction of the baseball fields, softball fields, including construction of an artificial turf multi-purpose field and track, lights, fencing and related amenities at the Draper Field complex and Phillips Brothers Field complex.”

A question was raised on how this article effects the override. The article is separate from the override and will not have any bearing on this year’s budget. The money will come from borrowing that will be paid in the future.

Administrator Sette read the commentary for the audience. A brief explanation was given by the Field Ad Hoc Committee Chair on the article.

A member of the audience asked what the position of the Finance Committee is. Finance Committee Chair Hockenbury noted that the committee has not taken a position on the town meeting articles as the warrant has not closed. The Finance Committee will vote on all articles and will provide their position at the Town Meeting.

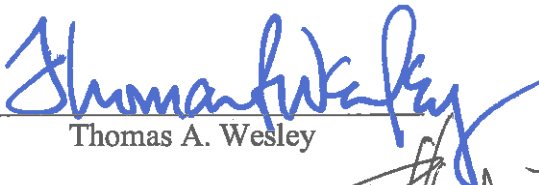
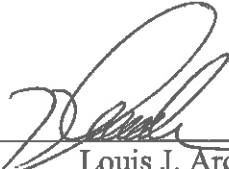
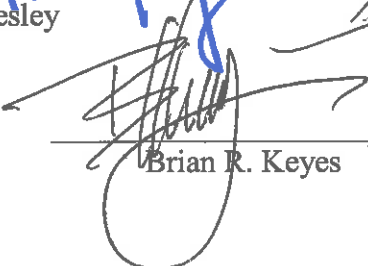
Selectman Arcudi wanted it noted that his supporting placing the article on the warrant is not an indication of his support of the article. Selectmen Wesley commented that it’s part of the democratic process.

RCV to approve placing Article 23 on the Town Meeting warrant.

Selectman Arcudi – Aye, Selectman Wesley – Aye, Selectman Keyes – Aye

I. Adjournment

The Board adjourned the regular meeting at 7:55 p.m.

 _____ Thomas A. Wesley	 _____ Louis J. Arcudi, III
 _____ Brian R. Keyes	

Hopedale Board of Selectmen

*MSDV – Moved, Seconded, Discussed and Voted

**RCV- Roll Call Vote