

Hopedale Select Board
Multi-Community Summit re: Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School
October 26, 2023 at 7:00 p.m.
Hopedale Community House, 43 Hope Street, Hopedale, MA
DRAFT

In Attendance: Hopedale Select Board Chair Hazard, and members Mr. Stock, Mr. Savage
Hopedale Town Administrator M. Ruscitti and Executive Assistant K. Grant

Also in attendance were elected and appointed officials from the 13 Blackstone Valley Regional Vocational Technical School (BVT) member communities (Bellingham, Blackstone, Douglas, Grafton, Hopedale, Mendon, Milford, Millbury, Millville, Northbridge, Sutton, Upton, and Uxbridge) as well as Dr. Michael Fitzpatrick, BVT Superintendent-Director and members of the general public.

Quorum present and called to order at 7:00 p.m.

A. Multi-community summit regarding BVT spending, budgeting, and financial management:

Hopedale Select Board Chair Hazard began the summit by welcoming all those communities who were present and thanking them for their attendance. Chair Hazard went on to explain the purpose of the Summit and spoke about Hopedale's concerns and vision moving forward.

"I'm Glenda Hazard, chairwoman of the Hopedale Select Board. Thank you all for accepting our invitation. I'm really thrilled to see you all here.

Over the years, I've heard it said that the 13 towns in the BVT district don't really care how the rest of the towns in the district feel, and I called this meeting because I don't really believe that's true. There have been many times I've wondered how you all respond to the financial constraints the majority of us are facing, and if there are other related concerns we all share. To that end, I'm hoping this is the beginning of a meaningful collaboration between us all.

Tonight's summit is a result of us having heard from many surrounding communities with a desire to discuss budgetary issues related to our vocational school. We feel this is absolutely in the spirit of our charter. Speaking on behalf of Hopedale, we have long felt that our town's budgetary input for the Blackstone Valley Technical/Vocational School typically occurs too late.

Like many small communities in this corridor, Hopedale operates under a tight budget; as a result, we must be responsible for every dollar we spend. Presently, the state assessment process places increased burden on communities such as ours, and we find ourselves forced to cut local programs

and services in response to costs such as those related to BVT that we can't control.

This scenario makes it difficult, if not impossible, to invest in our own public-school students, facilities, and both operating and capital improvements without asking for additional revenues from taxpayers in the form of overrides.

But I want to be clear that the purpose of the meeting this evening is not to disparage BVT or any of its administrators. There is little question that BVT is a tremendous institution and one of the best technical schools in the Commonwealth. Rather, this meeting is to see if there is community consensus to address some of the institutional budgetary issues that have evolved over the years while the charter has remained unchanged.

Historically, by the time our Annual Town Meeting comes around, we are told that BVT already has enough votes in the other communities to pass, effectively negating our right to vote. Generally, we are presented with a figure that will be Hopedale's share - without input from our local Finance Committee or Select Board, and whether or not we feel we can afford it. This has been deeply concerning for both our boards and our residents, who tell us they feel cut out of the process. We've heard from several of you that your towns feel the same.

In Hopedale, we believe that as towns included in the Charter, we should all be able to determine what costs we can afford to send to BVT so that all students who reside in our towns are equitably supported. We often feel that the Hopedale Public Schools are forced to cut yet BVT hasn't had to make the same kind of sacrifices. And because our schools are adept at doing more with less, our students are often prioritized in BVT admissions, at a cost to our town in more than one way. When I taught in Hopedale, I can remember one particular student that needed and wanted to go to BVT. And so he went. It was that simple, but now that's not necessarily that case.

Last year in Hopedale, we asked voters to support an override, and even though it passed, we still had to make cuts to our schools while the BVT budget was up. Again, I want to reiterate that I'm glad BVT is a wonderful school, but we want all our schools to be wonderful.

Some ideas will be discussed tonight as a starting point - perhaps even the idea of a CAP, whether it be through a percentage of dollars or through a cap on overall enrollment, with the intent of easing the financial burden on communities.

It is clear that per capita, some communities are vastly over-represented at BVT, which places uneven financial hardship on certain communities. It is also clear that BVT admissions don't mirror a socioeconomic cross section of the 13 communities. This also contributes to the uneven allocation of financial burden. This is a systemic problem in the Commonwealth right now in vocational education. Comparing standardized testing and college matriculation compared to public non-vocational schools, show the changes in vocational education. To be blunt,

BVT can be more selective in admissions, which can unfairly punish communities whose public schools whose students are succeeding.

As an institution, we believe that BVT should have to operate within the same financial constraints that each municipal budget does. We, as Charter communities, need a better way to communicate with each other so that we are all in unison, wherever possible, on a BVT budget before our respective town budgeting processes begin. We feel it should be clear that the goal is to provide a great education for all students in our communities whether they go to BVT or stay in our local schools. We want to be able to invest in programs and facilities locally at the same level we invest at BVT, and to see those investments vetted in the same way we all vet and plan local projects.

Again, Hopedale is thrilled to host this important discussion and we are anxious to hear your concerns and ideas. It is our hope that tonight can be the start of a continuing conversation on our shared education mission.”

- B. Town Administrator Remarks: Hopedale Town Administrator Mitch Ruscitti suggested that those who wish to speak should focus on what the individual towns feel are their struggles and goals and avoid criticisms of individuals.
- C. Town Official Public Comment: At this time, any town who wished to address the attendees was invited to do so. Representatives from Bellingham, Millbury, Douglas, Milford, Hopedale, and Millville all addressed the crowd. The common theme among them being their feeling of not having a voice in the BVT budget process and BVT continuing act as though they have an “open checkbook” and are not held to the same constraints as the towns are.
- D. Remarks from Dr. Fitzpatrick BVT Superintendent: Dr. Fitzpatrick began by giving a brief overview of BVT’s financials and the school’s program offerings. He addressed some of the concerns expressed by member communities.
- E. Community Public Comments: Citizens were given the opportunity to offer comments and concerns as parents, taxpayers, and teachers in the feeder communities.
(To view the entire summit, including all comment sections, the video is located here: https://townhallstreams.com/stream.php?location_id=56&id=55893)
- F. The meeting concluded at 8:45 p.m.
- G. Chair Hazard adjourned the Hopedale Select Board meeting at 8:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:
Kelly Grant, Executive Assistant

Select Board approved: _____

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

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: _____



HOPEDALE POLICE DEPARTMENT

70 Hopedale Street
Hopedale, MA 01747

TO: Chief Mark Giovanella #23
FROM: Officer Jeffrey White #83
Reference: Letter of Resignation

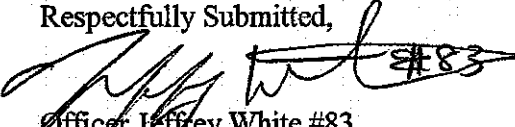
December 19, 2023

Please accept this letter as my formal resignation effective January 8, 2024. I have decided to accept a police officer position with a different agency that better aligns with my career goals and expectations. I have enjoyed my time working for the Town of Hopedale and have learned many things that I will take with me as I continue my career. Though this decision was not easy, there were several factors that I took into consideration when determining if I was going to seek employment elsewhere.

The primary reason for seeking employment elsewhere was the call volume and size of the town. Being that I am near the beginning of my career, I am interested in being a part of a department with a higher call volume where I am able to put my training and experience to work. Additionally, the department I am starting with is crediting me for my over six years of prior law enforcement and military experience. When I started in Hopedale, I had almost five years of prior law enforcement experience and additional training, but was started at the base step, which is where new academy graduates start. With joining a larger agency, I will be afforded opportunities that are just not available or needed in a department the size of Hopedale.

I have enjoyed my time serving the residents of Hopedale and have learned many things from my fellow officers, supervisors, and dispatchers that I will bring with me as I continue my career. Thank you for the opportunity and support.

Respectfully Submitted,


Officer Jeffrey White #83
Hopedale Police Department



TOWN OF HOPEDALE

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Select Board
Glenda A. Hazard, Chair
Bernard J. Stock
Scott M. Savage

Town Administrator
Mitchell Ruscitti

December 20, 2023

TO: Select Board
FROM: Martha White, Executive Assistant
Kelly Grant, Executive Assistant
REGARDING: Annual licenses scheduled for approval 12/26/23
COPY TO: Mitch Ruscitti, Town Administrator

For Board members' information, while the licensing requirements vary somewhat depending on the license type, generally the following (and often additional) information is required:

- Evidence of compliance with the MA Department of Unemployment Assistance
- Evidence of compliance with the MA Department of Revenue
- Evidence of Worker's Compensation Insurance
- 24-Hour Emergency contact information
- Confirmation that no taxes or other fees are owed to the Town

Complete applications have been submitted and all other requirements fulfilled for the following applicants; accordingly, it is recommended that the Select Board approve these licenses for 2024:

CLASS II (USED CAR SALES) LICENSE

- Costa Auto Group, Inc.

COMMON VICTUALLER

- Beyond Full
- Christiano's Pizza
- Cumberland Farms

This completes the Board's approval of calendar year 2024 licenses.