

Meeting Minutes of the Special Meeting of Hanover Board of Selectmen held via conference call on Monday, April 13, 2020 @ 10:00 AM

Present via Zoom Conference call: Chairman John Tuzik, Vice Chairman Emmanuel Dockter, Selectman David Delaney, Selectwoman Jocelyn Keegan and Selectman John Barry. Also present Town Manager (TM) Joe Colangelo and via conference call Assistant Town Manager (ATM) Ann Lee, Finance Director (FD) Lincoln Heineman, and Executive Assistant Janet Tierney.

At 10:00 a.m. the Chair opened the meeting.

The Board recognized the efforts of Fire Captain Freeman, Fire Chief Blanchard and Deputy Fire Chief Cavallaro for their hard work in setting up the Covid-19 Mobile Healthcare Unit. The Chair informed the public that details on the Mobile Healthcare Unit are available on the Hanover Fire Department's website.

Representatives from Westin and Sampson provided the Board with an update on the progress of the installation of the new water system, stating that it is at the substantial completion point at this time. The well has been tested and is looking good. The next step will be to look at the water chemistry itself and then pumping into the system. The reps estimated that it will be another few days to dial in the chemistry and make sure the operators are comfortable with the system. They are also working with the DEP on getting their letter of approval and are expecting to receive it in the next day or two. They informed the Board that DEP has office closures at this point due to the Covid crises but nevertheless they expect to receive the letter of approval soon.

The Board requested an exact estimate of when it will be pumping into the system. The rep stated that the main concern is that each of the three plants are pumping properly and that the operators are comfortable with the system before putting pressure on them, further stating that it should be online in two weeks, barring any unforeseen problems such as not receiving the letter from DEP or equipment failure, however they are expecting the letter in a day or two and the equipment has been tested and is operating correctly.

The Board expressed that they want to be sure the Town is not absorbing any costs associated with delays caused by the design of the system.

The Board requested that social media and possibly a mailing be used to alert the at risk population that the system is going online. The DPW Director informed the Board that they have reached out to hospitals, doctors, dialysis centers, pet stores and fish tank owners but agreed that a reminder is a good idea.

The Board expressed an interest in inviting the Westin and Sampson representatives back after the system goes live to discuss how the process went.

TM and FD provided a general recap of the budget stating that the previous presentations given on the budget are available for all on the website. TM informed the Board that, under the Town Manager Act, TM is required to present a budget 90 days prior to Town Meeting, therefore the budget that was put together back on February 21st is the legal budget. TM requested guidance on the Board's goals for a reassembled budget. The Board and TM agreed that the goals which are not necessarily agreed upon but should be considered are no property tax increases for the average resident and trying to maintain all the employee positions possible. In particular TM asked for guidance on how much free cash the Board is willing to put towards the budget. The original version of the budget included the use of \$750,000 in free cash. TM informed the Board that the above mentioned goals cannot be achieved without substantive reductions in services, further noting that the big variable in achieving these goals is how much free cash the Board is willing to use.

The Chair emphasized that he does not want the Board to create goals, objectives or policies that are not possible to achieve.

The Board discussed goals and different approaches to formulating the reassembled budget including the possibility of having a Special Town Meeting in the fall to vote on capital items.

The Chair requested information on the steps necessary to have a fall Special Town Meeting.

FD informed the Board that the certified free cash amount is known until June 30th, and that he is working with Town Accountant Chelsea Stevens to accelerate the free cash certification for the Fall and Winter.

The Board requested information on how CPA works and what the steps would be to change it if necessary. FD will request Town Counsel's guidance on the steps necessary to change the CPA amount and report back to the Board.

FD informed the Board that there is also a Stabilization Fund which is separate from free cash. It is there specifically to stabilize the Town's finances in a crisis. He further noted that use of the Stabilization Fund will require a 2/3 vote at Town Meeting.

The Board requested that FD provide the Board with a list of Town and School accounts so that the Board will know where the money is and all the information will be in one place for them.

FD informed the Board that he is working on closing out old capital items where money had been appropriated but hadn't been used entirely or will not be used.

The Board expressed an interest in a list of the current debt obligations being paid through CPC.

The Board expressed a desire to start considering warrant articles in the next meeting or two.

TM requested guidance from the Board on keeping the already budgeted use of \$750,000 in free cash or adding an additional amount to that. TM and FD proposed an additional \$800,000.

The Chair expressed that he is looking for the Board to come up with a stand on what they want to do with free cash. Not necessarily a policy. TM informed the Board he will need an answer this week.

The Chair reminded the Board that they should be mindful of the level of sacrifice tax payer residents will be willing to take before saying that taxes will not be raised, asking if the Board would like to consider looking at minimal increases to avoid a large problem in 2022.

TM cautioned the Board that \$350,000 in cuts is \$100,000 more than originally planned and the effects will be drastic.

FD commented that a buy in from the School side is critical here. If more than half of the cuts need to come from the Town side there will definitely be noticeable service reductions.

The Board and FD discussed contacting Tom Burke of the Affordable Housing Trust and discussing help for residents who are hurting, in particular targeted health for them, and helping small business owners who cannot apply for unemployment.

The Chair instructed the Board to look at the information TM and LH provided on the budget.

The Vice Chair commented that in his opinion the first goal should be to plan for FY22 as it is expected that FY22 will be worse.

His second goal would be to avoid permanent employee layoffs, but leaving open the possibility of short term employee furloughs.

His third goal would be to provide relief to residents in need, keeping the real estate taxes flat for most residents. He further clarified that the zero property tax increase would be for most but not all residents.

The Vice Chair stated that he would like to take a crisis response approach to the budget for the next year or two. He supports keeping everything on the table and looking at the numbers. The money will still be there but adjustments may be made.

TM suggested that the Board may want to ask for voter approval for the financing of some capital items if free cash cannot be used and there is no other funding source for them.

TM agreed to provide the Board and Advisory Committee with a list of capital items that should in TM and FD's opinion be on the warrant for approval, a list of items that should be taken off completely and a list to be considered for financing.

Selectman Barry would like to hold on the tax bills if we can, consider a reduction or suspension of the CPA, suspend OPEB for one year, reallocate the money for capital items and revisit it in one year. However, he does not expect meals tax revenue to be at the same level next year.

Selectwoman Keegan stressed the importance of discussing what exactly free cash can be used for. She would like to preserve what the Town has saved as we are heading into a storm. She would like to see this year being kept as neutral as possible.

Selectman Delaney expressed an interest in seeing the list of capital items that are considered necessary at this point.

TM commented that there are no wrong answers and many valid points. TM and FD need to finish some semblance of a budget this week which may change a week from now.

For now TM and FD will need to go forward planning on using \$750,000 in free cash but not the additional \$800,000.

The Chair would be willing to use more free cash but acknowledged that he is in the minority.

TM provided a Covid update to the Board, discussing recently passed legislation regarding property taxes. TM informed the Board that according to FD if tax payments are not received on May 4th there will be difficulties with meeting obligation payments.

TM informed the Board that Fire Captain Freeman received State approval of the Mobile Integrated Health program.

TM cautioned the Board that Hanover could be facing power outages and a few rough days due to the impending storm. The Vice Chair asked that dry ice delivery be looked into to help residents preserve food in the event of a power outage.

At 11:24 am the Chair requested a roll call vote to enter into Executive Session to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining agreements as the Chair had concluded that discussion of such in open session would negatively impact the position of the public body. The Board will not return to open session.

Roll call vote: Vice Chair Dockter aye, Selectman Barry aye, Selectman Delaney aye, Chairman Tuzik aye, Selectwoman Keegan was not available to attend.

The meeting ended and adjourned at 11:57 am.