

TOWN OF WENHAM
Joint Wenham & Hamilton Board of Selectmen
Meeting of April 13, 2020
Town Hall, 138 Main Street

Pursuant to the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. Chapter 30 A, §§ 18-25, written notice posted by the Town Clerk delivered to all Board members, a meeting of the Wenham Board of Selectmen (BOS) was held on Monday April 13, 2020 at 6:30 pm virtually on zoom.us with the Hamilton Board of Selectmen.

The Town of Wenham has a three-member Board of Selectmen elected for three-year terms with one seat up for election each year. Catherine Harrison (2020); John Clemenzi (2021); Jack Wilhelm (2022).

The Board of Selectmen serve as the chief executive body of the Town. The board's duties include in part appointing the Town Administrator and other board/committee members, developing goals and policies, preparing the town report, the annual budget, and presenting the warrant for Town Meeting.

The Board typically meets the first and third Tuesday of each month at 6:30 pm in Town Hall. The BOS meetings are posted on the Town calendar. All meetings are open to the public and may be viewed on local cable channels HWCAM.org or YouTube HWCAM.

Please be advised that this open meeting is being broadcast live via Zoom and recorded for playback on-line, video on-demand viewing at hwcam.org. The listings of matters are those reasonably anticipated by the Chair 48 hours before said meeting, which may be discussed at the meeting. Not all items listed may in fact be discussed. Items may be taken out of order and at times that differ from those listed below. Other items not listed may also be brought up for discussion to the extent permitted by law. All participants wishing to address the Board of Selectmen must indicate so in the Zoom meeting chat.

In response to the Covid19 Virus pandemic, the Massachusetts Governor closed all non-essential businesses and issued stay at home advisory. To comply with the Governor's orders that there be no gatherings, this meeting took place virtually. It was confirmed all could be heard, and all votes would be roll call.

Call to Order - With a quorum present, Mr. Wilhelm called the Wenham BOS meeting to order at 6:34 pm.

Wenham Selectmen present: Jack Wilhelm, Chair; Catherine Harrison, Clerk

Not Present: John Clemenzi

Also present: Anthony Ansaldi, Town Administrator; Jackie Bresnahan, Director of Administrative Services
Catherine Tinsley, Recording Secretary

Call to Order - With a quorum present, Mr. Hubbard called the Hamilton BOS meeting to order at 6:34 pm.

Hamilton Selectmen present: Jeffrey Hubbard, Chair; Shawn Farrell; Darcy Dale; Rosie Kennedy; William Olson

Also present: Joe Domelowicz, Town Manager; Marisa Batista, Finance Director; William Bowler, Hamilton Town Moderator

Coordinating rescheduling of Town Meeting and Town Elections

It was noted that newly enacted M.G.L. requires towns to have an annual election by June 30. Although the Governor continues to make changes in light of the COVID 19 virus, no changes have been made to this date.

The Selectmen discussed June 20 for the annual Town meeting and June 25 for annual elections. It was noted that the Town of Hamilton has a bylaw that required them to hold their elections within five days of the annual town meeting; Wenham does not have such a bylaw.

Mr. Wilhelm opined it was premature to set dates for town meeting/ elections and present to the public, but was practical for discussion purposes.

Ms. Harrison agreed it was not unreasonable to save the dates and was a reasonable approach with the current crisis situation, especially since Wenham has 5 questions and 3 budget overrides on the ballot.

The town clerks in both towns are taking a proactive approach to encourage residents to vote with absentee ballots and early voting to reduce the number of people gathering.

Mr. Bowler, Hamilton Town Moderator, concurred that holding a town meeting/ voting is a concern with many communities and some have suggested town meetings be held outside or delaying non-essential business to a fall town meeting.

Mr. Bowler suggested town meeting only include key items and the remainder of the town business be deferred to a fall town meeting.

Discussion of FY'20 budget impacts from the COVID-19 response and what it means for operations this year.

- Discussion of joint programs

Mr. Wilhelm began the discussion and asked what Hamilton is evaluating / doing.

Mr. Domelowicz said Ms. Batista has done an analysis of the town's budget and identified line items to avoid spending; estimates also were done on potential revenue reductions and the town of Hamilton extended the tax due date to June 1, 2020. Ms. Batista reviewed that department heads were asked to make a list of essential purchases and potential savings in expenses. The concern is that the real estate collection in the fourth quarter will be down (8%) and it is hoped to balance the FY2020 budget with cost savings; the savings goal is \$500,000. The Town of Hamilton based their estimates on 2008/2009 collection rates.

Mr. Wilhelm noted that a 10 percent shortfall in tax revenue for Wenham would have an impact of \$460,000.

Regarding joint programs, Mr. Hubbard said he has received emails of concern in response to Mr. Wilhelm's comments that the Wenham BOS consider furloughing employees, specifically the library that some considered non-essential during the crisis.

Mr. Wilhelm clarified that the Town Administrator was only tasked to look at the budget and all town departments for potential expense reductions in anticipation of revenue shortfall. His concern is that residents will ask the BOS what the town did during the crisis to save money; the BOS has not made a decision to furlough employees but it remains an option.

Ms. Dale questioned if Wenham has considered other cost saving ideas, other than furloughing, such as pay-as-you-throw trash program, hybrid police department regionalization, combining resources between Hamilton and Wenham under one umbrella, and cited her concern for the joint programs that are important to residents, rather than destroying the library system or other joint programs.

Mr. Wilhelm reiterated the Town Administrator is to consider all areas and make a recommendation to the BOS.

Mr. Domelowicz responded from an administrative view in talking with other north shore community leaders, that this health crisis is causing a financial crisis, and most are trying to get through FY20 and hold their employees harmless and not create a bigger problem than needs to be created. He observed that employees on unemployment have to pay COBRA (insurance costs) which is more money out of pocket. For the town to realize any savings through layoffs, two employees have to be laid off. The Town of Hamilton would not make this recommendation at this time, but instead would look to change expenses is FY21 budget.

Ms. Dale asked what the Wenham Finance Committee has to say on this topic. Mr. Wilhelm replied the Finance Committee met last week and discussed the finances of the town but did not make recommendations.

Mr. Ansaldi reviewed the Finance Committee had a general discussion on the FY21 budget and would continue to monitor the situation. The Finance Committee meets again on Wednesday.

The Hamilton BOS asked to be kept updated on Wenham's decisions regarding budget changes.

- Discussion of FY'21 budget

The towns are in communication with the Hamilton Wenham Regional School District Superintendent, Dr. Kukenberger, who acknowledged an awareness to potential declining revenue on the town and state level; the direct impact to Hamilton / Wenham is unknown. The HWRSB is looking strategically at the budgets.

Dr. Kukenberger cautioned that remote learning right now may not provide the same level or quality of services compared to being in a classroom and this comes at a cost to both towns as the school is limited to what services can be delivered in this current setting. Dr. Kukenberger expected increases in compensatory services when students/teachers returned back to school. Although not optimistic from the school's perspective, she assured the selectmen that the district was doing everything they could to look at reductions. A cost savings analysis was recently updated during the closure, but was not as fruitful as was hoped.

Ms. Harrison agreed that the FY20 budget should be monitored the next few months, and reiterated her support to manage expenditures to maintain personnel. Regarding FY21, Ms. Harrison opined the appetite for overrides and debt exclusions may be significantly different and was interested in options for FY21.

Although Dr. Kukenberger agreed with this statement, she questioned what was the harm in asking for the override to give the voters a chance to speak to meet the real need of the school and to understand the long-term impact.

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Ms. Kennedy responded that she read a current statistic that 50% of business people are small business and the vast majority have furloughed employees and are in risk of going under. Ms. Kennedy expressed her concern with the long-term impact and financial ramifications when the crisis is over, and that the Towns/Schools continue to talk optimistically and conservatively, at a bare bone minimum, while the economy recovers over the next year and not put additional pressure on residents by forcing a budget people cannot afford.

Dr. Kukenberger concurred but observed one of her biggest worries since she came to Hamilton Wenham last year was that the school had budget challenges during a healthy fiscal environment, and what would happen when there was a massive decline. In closing, she reiterated that this does not change the needs of the school programs and capital needs of the aging buildings and that funding necessary programs or taking care of the facilities, are not “nice to haves” and why it is so important during healthy fiscal times investments are being made incrementally and thinking smartly about short term and long-range visions of the community.

Ms. Harrison commented the uncertainty of it all is most troubling. Ms. Harrison heard one resolution (through legislation) by the state may be to budget quarterly.

In closing, Mr. Hubbard noted with things changing daily, it was important to keep the lines of communication open.

Mr. Domelowicz summarized there was general agreement from both boards to save the dates for a June 20 Town Meeting and June 25 Town Elections and work towards this goal.

It was agreed to hold a joint meeting again in 3 weeks to discuss and confirm those proposed June dates.

The June 20 date was tentatively communicated to the Superintendent to hold the dates for the meeting rooms at the schools.

Adjournment - Both Boards of Selectmen adjourned by roll call at 7:18 pm

Respectfully Submitted By
Catherine Tinsley
4.16.2020