

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
MAY 26, 2020**

In accordance with Governor Baker's March 12, 2020, Order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law G.L. c.30A, §20, the meeting was held remotely in an on-line conference mode hosted on Zoom.com and members of the public were not able to physically attend. The meeting was broadcast live on Comcast channel 12 and was able to be viewed via live stream at WHCA.tv. The meeting was subsequently broadcast on YouTube.com.

In attendance were Chairman Carl F. Kowalski; Vice Chairman Daniel L. Salvucci; Clerk Brian J. Bezanson; Member Randolph G. LaMattina; Member Justin R. Evans; and Town Administrator Francis J. Lynam. Chairman Kowalski opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Chairman Kowalski asked everyone to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. This was followed by a moment of silence dedicated to those who have served in the armed forces.

Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to approve bill and payroll warrants. **Second** Mr. Bezanson. Roll call vote: Mr. Bezanson – yes; Mr. Evans – yes; Mr. Lamattina – yes; Mr. Salvucci – yes; and Chairman Kowalski – yes. **So voted 5-0.**

Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to accept correspondence in the Read File. **Second** Mr. Bezanson. Roll call vote: Mr. Bezanson – yes; Mr. Evans – yes; Mr. Lamattina – yes; Mr. Salvucci – yes; and Chairman Kowalski – yes. **So voted 5-0.**

Chairman Kowalski took the agenda out of order.

**BUDGET REVIEW**

**Police: Line Item Transfer**

Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to approve the request of Chief Hanlon for a line item transfer in the amount of \$4,645.20 from line item #121 Part Time Records Clerk to line item #120 Clerical. **Second** Mr. Bezanson. Roll call vote: Mr. Bezanson – yes; Mr. Evans – yes; Mr. Lamattina – yes; Mr. Salvucci – yes; and Chairman Kowalski – yes. **So voted 5-0.**

**Article 2 & June 22, 2020, Town Meeting Warrant**

Mr. Lynam advised the Board that Article 2 was prepared under the assumption that we would not be offering COLA's and that we would reach an agreement with Whitman-Hanson and have an assessment resulting from that agreement. Our budget is predicated on use of the statutory method and the hiring of 4 teachers. He went on to say that the question before us is what do we do as it relates to the agreement with Whitman-Hanson; and what are we going to do as it relates to COLA's for those employees with contracts and for nonunion employees. Our employees are concerned with employees of the region and the Town of Hanson receiving COLA's. Mr. LaMattina **MOVED** to appropriate \$105,000 from Free Cash to fund the cost of living increases to be negotiated with union and nonunion personnel for FY21, subject to the approval of Town Meeting. **Second** Mr. Salvucci. Mr. Salvucci asked Mr. Lynam if the increase in the budget is \$165,000 with COLA's and if the increase to our share of the school budget is \$758,000 with the

hiring of 4 teachers. Mr. Lynam confirmed this. Mr. Salvucci then asked why the school superintendent does not go back to the drawing board to find an additional \$200,000 in order to reduce our increase to \$558,000. He went on to say that the Hanson Board of Selectmen voted on Friday to go for an \$800,000 override. Chairman Kowalski stated that he thought the increase was less than \$758,000. Mr. Lynam stated that our share of the school budget is \$15,367,392 and our assessment is roughly \$207,000 more than Hanson's share if we agree to a 50/50 split with respect to the increase in Hanson's assessment. Mr. Salvucci asked why the taxpayers of Whitman would pay 50 percent of Hanson's increase if Hanson is going for an override. Mr. Lynam explained that the Town of Hanson would have to seek an override for any amount of its assessment. Mr. Salvucci said that he feels Hanson should go for the full amount in order to get their situation straightened out this year. If not, he feels that if the superintendent was able to take funds out of E&D and circuit breakers, he should be able to take an additional \$200,000 from somewhere else in the school budget. Mr. Lynam advised Mr. Salvucci that the superintendent committed funds that he took from the E&D account, money he saved on transportation and from other services. Mr. Evans noted that the superintendent cannot use one-time money for everything. Chairman Kowalski noted the numbers were sent to us for our consideration. Mr. LaMattina stated that Hanson has to go for an override anyway. We were clear that we could not exceed \$15.5 million for the schools; and Hanson has pushed the region into a 1/12<sup>th</sup> budget. He then commended the superintendent for coming up with the funds, which was done more for the benefit of Hanson. Mr. Evans then advised Mr. Salvucci that the schools will go to a 1/12<sup>th</sup> budget until at least July 20, 2020, which is when the Hanson Town Meeting will take place. If we force the issue, the schools will go to a 1/12<sup>th</sup> budget until at least December. Mr. Salvucci asked what will happen if Hanson's request for an override does not pass. Chairman Kowalski told Mr. Salvucci that if the Hanson override fails, it is not our business. Mr. LaMattina stated that \$15,156 million is the cost using the statutory method under the agreement and we are offering to pay the extra \$211,000. If we continued to use the previous method, our payment would be more than \$16 million. For us to see a savings, the region would have to come up with an additional \$500,000.

With respect to offering COLA's to employees, Mr. Bezanson feels that although our employees deserve recognition and respect for working through the pandemic, many of our citizens have been out of work. He does not believe that in this crisis anyone should be getting an increase in salary. Mr. Lynam reminded Mr. Bezanson that a one-year agreement was entered into with one union. If we treat the other unions the same, we will be starting a new three-year contract next year on the right foot. Recently, the cost of living has risen dramatically and there is some merit to treating everyone unilaterally. Mr. Evans asked if COLA's can be given without a contract. Mr. Lynam explained that the funds can be set aside and then we can enter into agreements with the unions. Chairman Kowalski asked if the approximate cost is \$165,000. Mr. Lynam said yes, and \$59,000 of that is for the fire union. Chairman Kowalski then noted that the money can be taken from Free Cash which results in no increase in taxes. Mr. Lynam noted that the teachers union and Hanson employees are receiving salary increases and he feels everyone should be treated equally. Mr. Salvucci asked if there is enough money in Free Cash or if a capital project will have to be put on hold because of this. Mr. Lynam advised Mr. Salvucci that there is more than \$1 million in Free Cash. Chairman Kowalski stated that COLA's being offered to our employees is linked to accepting the superintendent's agreement with a full statutory method and a 50/50 split, and moving forward with a full statutory method beginning next year. It also saves 40 school positions and adds 4 teachers. He then reminded the Board that when the town was surveyed last year, education was high on the list of priorities. Chairman Kowalski then asked for a vote in connection with the motion on the floor. Roll call vote: Mr. Bezanson – yes; Mr. Evans – yes; Mr. Lamattina – yes; Mr. Salvucci – yes;

and Chairman Kowalski – yes. **So voted 5-0.** Mr. Lynam will add this to the Town Meeting warrant.

Chairman Kowalski asked Mr. Lynam if he has heard from town counsel with respect to the regional agreement. Mr. Lynam said no, but he did specify to Attorney Sumners that in future years, the statutory method shall be the sole method used going forward. Chairman Kowalski asked if the Board votes this evening to amend line #175 of Article 2, could it be amended again before Town Meeting. Mr. Lynam said it could. Mr. Evans **MOVED** to amend line #175 of Article 2 (WHRSD Operating Expense) from \$15,156,235 to \$15,367,392. **Second** Mr. LaMattina. Mr. Lynam noted that if Hanson does not vote their assessment, all bets are off. Mr. LaMattina stated that if the override does not pass in Hanson and this budget gets rejected, we will then be paying what we paid last year.

Mr. Bezanson stated that the Finance Committee is opposed to the 50/50 split and a lot of comments and threats were made at the committee's last meeting. He does agree with their philosophy of our finances and because of that, this has become a personal conflict for him. Chairman Kowalski reminded Mr. Bezanson that we have been subsidizing Hanson for many years without knowing it; and he is not bothered by giving Hanson a boost one last time. Mr. Evans feels that the loss of 40 positions at the schools is a lot. Mr. Lamattina stated that he has been in the trenches of this for a while. We do have a financial responsibility to do this one last time in order to keep the children from suffering. He went on to say that a comment made at the Finance Committee meeting was a clear and obvious campaign statement. He went on to say that there were missteps along the way but he does not think this was an orchestrated event to keep the schools underfunded. The problem lies with the previous school administration and to call some people terrorists was a clear campaign statement. Two members of the Board of Selectmen and members of the School Committee are trying to do right by the children. Chairman Kowalski called for a vote in connection with the motion on the floor. Roll call vote: Mr. Bezanson – no; Mr. Evans – yes; Mr. Lamattina – yes; Mr. Salvucci – no; and Chairman Kowalski – yes. **So voted 3-2.** Chairman Kowalski asked Mr. Lynam to advise the Board of town counsel's approval of the regional agreement as soon as possible. Mr. Lynam agreed.

Mr. Lynam advised the Board that the Finance Committee has reviewed most of the articles and recommendations have been provided to the Board of Selectmen. The plan is to hold Town Meeting at the high school; however, the school is located in Hanson and our Town Meetings must be held within the geographical boundaries of the town. He went on to say that he has spoken with State Representative Allyson Sullivan and asked her to file legislation that would allow us to hold Town Meeting at the high school. Apparently, there is something pending but we may have to reschedule if it fails. Chairman Kowalski feels there are some dangers involved with holding a meeting and the safety issues associated with COVID-19.

Chairman Kowalski asked Mr. Lynam if there is any additional information with respect to suspending the senior volunteer program. Mr. Lynam stated that he made the recommendation to suspend it because the majority of the volunteers are placed at the library and the senior center. He does not plan on allowing volunteers to be placed at the senior center before Labor Day; and he may also delay placing them at the library. Also, the director of the COA is concerned with the hiring process because the interviews are approximately 20-25 minutes per volunteer. Mr. Lynam finished by saying that this is a questionable situation and he feels it is not

in our best interest to run the program at this time. Chairman Kowalski postponed discussion on this topic until a future meeting.

With respect to Article 2, Mr. Salvucci asked Mr. Lynam if the amount shown on line 30 (Cable Access Funding) is correct and Mr. Lynam said it is. Mr. Salvucci asked if the Planning Board is aware of line 33 (Flood Plain By-law). Mr. Lynam advised Mr. Salvucci that the Planning Board is aware of it and is holding a public hearing in June.

Mr. Evans asked Mrs. Green to speak on line 6 (Community Preservation Act). Mrs. Green stated that the Community Preservation Act proposes a 1 percent surcharge on property taxes after a \$100,000 exemption is removed from the value of the property. If the Act is adopted, it will go to a ballot vote which can be placed on the Presidential election ballot. There has been no change to the \$20 million the governor has dedicated to this for FY21. If approved, this will allow us to upgrade playground equipment, the town pool and historic buildings. She also noted that those considered low income as well as moderate income seniors will not have to pay the surcharge.

Mr. Lynam noted that the Plymouth County Commissioners will be administering the \$91 million they received for COVID-19 in 3 to 4 phases. Towns in Plymouth County will be included but regional schools will not. He passed this information on to the superintendent today. Since both Whitman and Hanson will be receiving funds, he suggested a Google spreadsheet be created for both towns and the schools in order to keep track of COVID related purchases. Mr. Lynam will bring the information forward as he receives it.

Chairman Kowalski asked if Mr. Lynam is seeking a vote on the Town Meeting warrant and Article 2. Mr. Lynam said yes, amendments made tonight can be voted at the next meeting. Mr. Evans said he would like to see the language for the amendment to the regional agreement prior to voting. He believes we can handle a 1/12<sup>th</sup> budget for a short time if needed. Mr. Lynam stated the Director of Accounts and the Board of Selectmen approve the school budget. He then reminded the Board that if Town Meeting does not take place prior to July, we will not have the flood zone maps and residents living in a flood zone cannot purchase flood insurance.

At 8:14 p.m. Mr. Salvucci **MOVED** to adjourn the meeting. **Second** Mr. Bezanson. Roll call vote: Mr. Bezanson – yes; Mr. Evans – yes; Mr. LaMattina – yes; Mr. Salvucci – yes; and Chairman Kowalski – yes. **So voted 5-0.**

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Brian J. Bezanson, Clerk