

Approved April 18, 2023

Select Board  
Meeting Minutes  
April 4, 2023 at 5:30 p.m.  
59 Main Street, Hatfield, MA

Present: Select Board Diana Szynal, Chair, Members Brian Moriarty and Edmund Jaworski

Also in attendance: Marlene Michonski, Town Administrator; Robert Betsold and Anna Holhut, Celebration Committee; Senator Jo Comerford; Patrick Brock, Hampshire Retirement Board; Robert Flaherty, Fire Chief; Lydia Szych, Town Clerk; Kerry Flaherty, President Hatfield Fire Association; Michael Wood, Superintendent; Christy Boudreau, Chair, School Committee; Diane Brzozowski, Chair, Kim Baker, Darryl Williams, Sean Barry and John Wilkes, Jr., Finance Committee

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Szynal called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

**POSTED BUSINESS**

TOPIC 3      Patrick Brock, Hampshire County Retirement Board: Presentation re: Chapter 269 of the Acts of 2022, COLA increases for Retirees: Mr. Brock presented before the Board with an update about the COLA increases for retirees - Chapter 269. Mr. Brock said the legislature looked at COLA increases for retirees at 5%. We have been giving COLA for retirees of 3% since 1997. Chair Szynal asked where the money comes from. Mr. Brock replied the Hampshire Retirement Board. You will pay a larger appropriation each year. In 1989 they moved from a pay-as-you-go to a funding system. Mr. Brock is traveling in the area asking for votes from municipalities to approve this. Selectman Moriarty reiterated for clarification purposes, the ask is an increase to 5% from 3% for FY23, so you are adding 2% retroactive to July of 2022 and Mr. Brock said that was correct. Selectman Moriarty made a motion to move the Hatfield Select Board approve Chapter 269 of the Acts of 2022 – An Act Relative to Cost-of-Living Adjustments for Retirees, and further direct the Hatfield administration to notify the Hampshire County Retirement System in writing of this vote; Selectman Jaworski seconded; no discussion; all in favor – aye; motion approved.

TOPIC 2      Senator Jo Comerford: Address legislative actions; Q/A: The Select Board thanked Senator Comerford for coming to this meeting and thanked her for the funding on the Rte. 5 project. Senator Comerford is delighted to go back to the legislature with any help Hatfield can use. The Select Board asked about local aid, Chapter 70 and Chapter 90 funding. Senator Comerford said we need to look at unrestricted government aid, I think we should open it up. We need some core aid coming in, we need to open up a formula, we have to open up Chapter 90. This is critical and it is time. Chair Szynal pointed out everything is more expensive, and we do less because of the cost. Selectman Jaworski added what kicks us is 2 ½%. We are always struggling with this. Is there anything on your end to help with 2 ½%? Senator

Comerford said in 2019 there was a study done which looked at what the State pays for schools and the levy limit. There will be a calculation of what the State tells us we can pay to Hatfield. It's capped at 82.5%. But it doesn't work as towns out here struggle to get to 82.5%. Over time, it means communities pay 59% and the State pays 41%. We need to open up the rural school's bill, we can open up special education funding. Chair Szynal asked about Masswork. Chair Szynal said we had to apply a few times and still didn't get the funding because we can't compete with a Natick or Framingham for the jobs that would be created.

Regarding the FY24 charter tuition reimbursement, Selectman Moriarty stated we spend \$300,000.00 and get back only \$90,000.00, the lack of \$200,000.00 is huge to Hatfield. Do you know if that could be brought into the conversation? Senator Comerford said it has to be put forward, this is a State issue. We created charter schools but there is a population decline. It must happen; we need charter reform that comes with money. We need policy reform when it comes to charter schools to bring them equally beneficial. I need to find a path forward and it won't be easy.

Chair Szynal asked what might be coming regarding Massworks and what do we do to be ready? Senator Comerford replied it has not been flushed out yet.

Regarding ARPA funding, Chair Szynal asked if there are ARPA funds coming and how we position ourselves. Senator Comerford said the ARPA money was allocated in full last fiscal year. It has been pushed forward into agencies but there are surplus monies, like school meals money. ARPA money is sitting in housing, economic development and seeing it in bigger grant buckets. Senator Comerford told the Board you need to tell me your biggest priorities, tell me the agencies you want to talk to, the grants you want to get, and we will work with you. We should be talking more.

Regarding the GIC health insurance, Chair Szynal asked if Senator Comerford could assist in any way. Chair Szynal said we struggle with health insurance. We sat down with GIC a while back and we were told it does not work for Hatfield, there is no financial benefit. Senator Comerford told the Board tell me the person you talked with or what are you looking for. The larger, wealthier communities seem to participate. Chair Szynal said we try to be good to our employees and good insurance at a good rate would be beneficial to Hatfield.

Selectman Moriarty asked Senator Comerford about the change to the State seal and flag. He said there is an article on the warrant for Town meeting to change the State flag and seal. Selectman Moriarty asked if there is a replacement of the seal and flag out there. Senator Comerford replied the legislature passed this in 2020 or 2021. A commission was formed to look at if the Commonwealth needs a new seal. It was slower going because of COVID. The commission will keep meeting until next November and they have decided yes the seal should be changed. They've had good conversations on what it should be changed to, but the conversation is on-going. Brian Boyle of Mass Humanities in Northampton is pushing for public input. The public should and can be engaged. People should have a say in the next seal design. Senator

Comerford said there has been a movement Statewide, a non-binding resolution, and if it passes, Hatfield will go on the list of supporting communities.

Chair Szynal asked Senator Comerford what do you need from us? Senator Comerford said she needs to know what bills are important to Hatfield. If you see a hearing, you should attend. These meetings are held online so you don't have to drive to Boston. Senator Comerford will follow up to schedule a meeting. We need to get it right for rural communities. When there is a hearing, come and testify virtually. Send in written testimonies - it's critical. Senator Comerford mentioned the Municipal Building Bill would be for DPW sheds, Town halls, public safety complexes. Hatfield has done well stewarding your resources. Senator Comerford asked the Board to please let her, or Alaina know what you need, we want to be super hands on. Let's think how Boston comes west to see you and your voices lead the way in the Statehouse. Senator Comerford informed the Board we are doing another grant forum, we brought representatives of agencies out to talk to towns and found this worthwhile. We are doing this again and starting with Massworks. We need to hear from you what your challenges are and what your questions are.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS** Chair Szynal announced in combination of developing Hatfield's Comprehensive Plan and the MVP Action grant, the school has collaborated with Cooler Communities a school grant program. As a result of this collaboration, the schools will hold an event "Climate Smart Hatfield and Cooler Communities Fair" on May 4, 2023 from 4:30 – 7:00 in the Smith Academy cafeteria to share their work with the general public. Students from HES and SA will display their work on projects related to the comprehensive plan. Some of their plans include models, posters, student survey and responses, local topographic maps with color-coded flood levels and a comparison of Emily Dickinson's poems about environmental concerns (1860s) to literature from early 2000s to student produced poems reflecting their concern in the 2020s.

**TOPIC 1**      Celebration Committee: Present planned activities and events: Robert Betsold and Anna Holhut presented before the Select Board with the 2023 concert series. The summer concert series has been booked and announced. We collaborated with the Cultural Council. We worked with the Lions Club so the dates will be firm in case of rain. If it rains on those dates, we will move the concerts to the Lions Pavilion. We are working on getting a food vendor for the events. We will coordinate with the Police and Fire Chiefs. A few other things we are looking into is using 350<sup>th</sup> leftover funds for a new "Welcome to Hatfield" sign to be placed somewhere around the Elm Court area. The next project is a sign in front of Town Hall. We are looking at a double-sided sign, the larger lettering side would face the road. On the back side, flyers could be posted. Selectman Moriarty said he has a concern what the sign would look like, who would be in charge of it, and where would it go? Mr. Betsold would like to potentially place it between the road and the sidewalk, but Mr. Betsold will definitely bring this before the Select Board before anything is final. Ms. Holhut informed the Board the Celebration Committee wants to rejuvenate the banners and we are looking for sponsors.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES** Selectman Jaworski made a motion to approve the March 28, 2023 Minutes; Selectman Moriarty seconded; no discussion; all in favor – aye; motion approved.

**TOPIC 4** FY2024 Budget, Capital Projects and Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles: Discussion and review with Finance Committee @ 6:30 p.m.: Mr. Williams asked if snow and ice is in the workbook and the answer was no. Ms. Michonski said Mr. Genovese anticipated another \$13,000.00 in bills. Ms. Baker asked if there is something we can do so we don't have to borrow funds for the Smith Academy Park pavilion. Discussion occurred when the pavilion project first came about and if the project could be pushed off. Chair Szynal asked about Host Community Agreements. Ms. Michonski informed the Board one is not ready; one is in negotiation; and the third one is not doing anything yet.

Christy Boudreau, Chair School Committee came before the Select Board and Finance Committee stating there is less revenue in school choice coming into the tune of \$70,000.00. What is the impact for the kids if 2 ½ does not pass? Hatfield Elementary classroom size would double and there will be cuts to music and arts. At Smith Academy the class size would double; we would lose focus attention on middle class; limited use of the library; we could not support music; we would cut JV sports; no elementary school sports; we offer 22 clubs and the hours would be cut; electives would be cut; eight full-time teaching positions would be cut, we would lose part of our superintendent as he would be part-time; we would lose secretarial time. With all the changes, our concern is what happens the following year. There was an 11% drop in students. Five teachers from each school would be lost. We need a roof and boiler replacement.

Bob Flaherty, Fire Chief asked to speak about cuts in his budgets. Without the 2½ override, I can't change the exhaust filters; North Hatfield would close; no upgrading radios and pagers; no one could be sent to class; I would not be able to pay for medical physicals; no smoke detectors for seniors; one person would be able to attend the academy and get books; and there would not be business expenses.

Phil Genovese spoke about what cuts to the DPW would occur and if the cuts would be taken from the Transfer Station. This would mean the Transfer Station is no longer open on Wednesday, only Saturday from 7-1; there would be no brush pile; and no seasonal employees.

Discussion ensued about adding everything in to come up with a figure to put in the override question. Chair Szynal asked what the total the school needs to position itself for this upcoming fiscal year and beyond that. If we are doing an ask of residents, make sure we have everything included. Mr. Williams suggested reconvening on Monday, April 10, and taking a look at the budget workbook with the 1.3 million added in. Mr. Barry asked about the requested amounts from police and fire. He wanted to be sure we knew what the override amount would be before leaving tonight. This way when we reconvene, we know what we are looking for in an override amount. By the end, the needed amount for the FY24 budget would be approximately 1.7 million. Mr. Barry said are there are things we can do to bring the amount down to a more reasonable number? Maybe we need to look at what we can and cannot live without. Maybe we

can't expand all the services at once. Mr. Wilkes said we need to look at what necessities should be considered.

**CONTINUED OLD BUSINESS**

**UNANTICIPATED NEW BUSINESS**

**ADJOURN** Selectman Jaworski made a motion to adjourn; Chair Szynal seconded; no discussion; all in favor – aye; meeting ended at 9:06 p.m.

Respectfully,  
Karen Brodeur  
Executive Assistant