

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES OF MEETING
MARCH 8, 2022**

In attendance were Chairman Carl F. Kowalski; Vice Chairman Daniel L. Salvucci; Clerk Brian J. Bezanson; Member Justin R. Evans; Member Randolph G. LaMattina; and Town Administrator Lincoln D. Heineman. Present for the Hanson Board of Selectmen were Vice Chairman Kenneth Mitchell; Clerk Joseph Weeks; Member James Hickey; and Member Laura Fitzgerald-Kemmett. Hanson Town Administrator Lisa M. Green was also present.

Chairman of the Hanson Board of Selectmen Matthew Dyer was absent.

The meeting took place in the library at the Whitman Hanson Regional High School. Chairman Kowalski opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Mitchell advised Chairman Kowalski that Hanson Board of Selectmen Chairman Matthew Dyer will not be attending.

Chairman Kowalski advised those present that he had spoken with Mr. Dyer on Monday and they both agreed a joint meeting would allow both boards to review the FY23 budget for the school district and to focus on long-range sustainability. Both agreed that using one-time monies could cause problems in the future and that a joint meeting will allow the two towns to let the district know what they can handle.

Mr. Evans indicated he would like to see the budget process for the district move along faster. Currently, the district presents the assessment late, resulting in the two towns having to work harder, noting it usually is not until mid to late March or mid-April before we are in agreement.

Chairman Kowalski asked both town administrators what they feel their towns would be comfortable with for an assessment. Mr. Heineman stated the figure presented by Superintendent Szymaniak on February 2 reflected a 5.76 percent increase which would cause Whitman to have to use free cash. The projected increase of 3.67 percent presented on February 16, would fit within the levy without the use of free cash. Mr. Heineman noted the Board of Selectmen has no desire to use one-time funds to balance a budget; and expressed concern with the budget going in that direction in FY25 and beyond. Hanson Town Administrator Lisa Green stated that their town accountant used 3.25, 3.5 and 4 percent placeholders. When they saw the 5.76 percent that was then lowered to 3.7 percent, they knew it would not be feasible without decimating their town departments. When asked by Chairman Kowalski what number Hanson is comfortable with, Mrs. Green stated the town accountant is comfortable with 3 percent. Mr. Heineman advised Chairman Kowalski that Whitman is comfortable with 3.67 percent.

Mr. Salvucci stated that he would like to see the district apply the governor's numbers and work to come up with a budget by the end of January or early February in order to keep both towns from having to certify their budgets at the last minute. Mrs. Kemmett agreed, noting that the budget used to be emailed to the two towns and the superintendent and business manager would attend a meeting with both Whitman and Hanson selectmen to explain it. She would like to see

that process return and, while she appreciates the education process, it is unfair to town employees to have to wait until the last minute to make budget decisions.

Mr. LaMattina stated that he is looking for more transparency, noting it was active citizens that discovered issues with the Circuit Breaker funds. He went on to say this budget is reckless because it's packed with the use of one-time funds. This meeting is to further the partnerships but he does not see partnership from the district. This budget is disastrous for the two towns and if the district is allowed to use one-time funds, there will be a serious deficit in FY2025.

Mr. Weeks stated that he appreciates this meeting and agrees there is a massive fiscal issue that needs to be looked at. This is not a sustainable budget and though he believes the district deserves to have everything it wants, it should not be at the expense of town departments.

Christopher Howard, Chairman of the Whitman-Hanson Regional School District Committee, stated that both he and Superintendent Szymaniak would attend this meeting to listen but would not be prepared to discuss what should or should not be in the budget. He also noted they were not invited to the meeting.

Mr. Hickey stated that he was under the impression that an invitation was sent and therefore he was against this meeting taking place. He then exited from the meeting.

Chairman Kowalski stated that he made it clear that Mr. Heineman was to extend an invitation to Mr. Howard, Superintendent Szymaniak and Mr. Stanbrook. He also made it clear that he did not want Superintendent Szymaniak to feel it was necessary to present the school budget. Mr. Heineman explained that early last week he had a conversation with Superintendent Szymaniak at which time he said he would be sending out a formal invitation. He was asked by Superintendent Szymaniak to hold off on sending it because he wanted the chance to speak with Mr. Howard first. Mr. Heineman agreed and eventually received an email from Mr. Howard stating he would be attending the meeting.

Mr. Howard stated the question is not the invitation; and noted the school committee does not have the authority to work with the Boards of Selectmen on the budget. Discussion took place regarding the expectations associated with this meeting and the partnership between the two Boards of Selectmen and the WHRSDC. Mr. Salvucci reminded everyone that in previous years, one member of each towns' Finance Committee and one member of each Board of Selectmen would attend a meeting of the school committee where they were asked what they could afford. He also asked again why the budget presentation is not made earlier.

Chairman Kowalski called on Superintendent Szymaniak and Mr. LaMattina called for a point of order as he had been sitting with his hand raised. Chairman Kowalski then explained that Mr. Howard had spoken with both him and a member of the Hanson Board of Selectmen prior to this meeting. It was made clear to Mr. Howard that it was not necessary to have the entire school committee here to discuss the budget and that the desire to have Superintendent Szymaniak here was in case there were any questions that he would have the answers to. It was also made clear to Mr. Howard that the purpose of the meeting was not to negotiate.

Superintendent Szymaniak stated that in 2010 and 2011, the school committee met with the selectmen on a Saturday to discuss the budget but somewhere along the way, meeting on a Saturday fizzled out. This year they were not invited to present their budget to the Finance Committee until March 15, whereas previously they were invited in December. He also stated that their budget process begins in October and both Whitman and Hanson have not yet advised as to what they can afford.

Mr. Weeks stated that he would like to see a process outlined now, or adjourn and schedule another meeting. Mr. Mitchell and Mrs. Kemmett agreed. Mrs. Kemmett stated that the school committee has heard from us and that was our goal. Chairman Kowalski agreed that something was accomplished this evening as far as what the district can expect from the towns. He then indicated he is not sure if the process needs to begin earlier. He went on to say that we will need to request an override in order to have the schools and towns we want, noting the override should come from the school committee as a request to us. Chairman Kowalski finished by saying he believes some objections have been met and it might have been a mistake not to have invited the school committee. However, they have heard from Mr. Heineman and Mrs. Green as to what each town can afford and they need to figure out a way to get through next year. Mrs. Kemmett agreed, stating she has heard a willingness to partner and to work on a process.

At 7:06 p.m. Mrs. Kemmett **MOVED** to adjourn the meeting. **Second Mr. Weeks, so voted 8-0.**

Brian J. Bezanson, Clerk