

TOWN OF HOPKINTON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Meeting Date: March 25, 2003
MINUTES

Members Present:

F. Eric Sonnett, Chairman
Mary C. Pratt, Vice-Chairman
Leonard A. Holden
Ronald M. Clark
Paul J. Nelson

Others Present:

Jeff Gould, MetroWest Daily News Reporter
Sarah Duckett, Hopkinton Independent Editor
Michelle Gates, Chairman, and Al Rogers, Parks & Recreation Commission
J. T. Gaucher, DPW Director
Police Chief Thomas Irvin
Dr. John Phelan, Superintendent of Schools
Mark Abate, Planning Board
Theodore D. Kozak, Executive Secretary
Geri Holland, Clerk

7:00 p.m. Mr. Sonnett opened the Selectmen's meeting.

Town's Health Insurance Plan Discussion:

Mr. Abate from Strategic Benefit Advisors, Inc. gave an overview of the current health plan costs as it compares to actual claims costs for the Town's employees (see handout). Mr. Abate recommended to the Board of Selectmen to bid out the Health Insurance program to one company, using the same benefit packaging now offered by the Town Health Plan suggesting that the Town could save up to \$750,000 in costs.

Mr. Sonnett thanked Mr. Abate for providing this information to the Board, and suggested that the Board move into Executive Session to discuss contract negotiations with Collective Bargaining Units regarding the proposal.

Move into Executive Session:

VOTE: Motion Mr. Clark to move into Executive Session for the sole purpose to discuss Collective Bargaining strategy; and then move back into public session for the purpose to continue the public meeting. Second Mr. Nelson. Mr. Sonnett: yes; Mrs. Pratt: yes; Mr. Holden: yes; Mr. Clark: yes; Mr. Nelson: yes. Unanimously voted.

8:00 p.m. p.m. The Board reconvened open session with discussion on notifying the West Suburban Health Group of the Town's decision to leave the Group by June 30th or a later date, if necessary.

Mr. Clark noted that correspondence he received from the Executive Secretary appeared to require the Town to notify the Group in writing, on or before March 31, 2003, of the Town's intent to leave on June 30, 2003. The Board directed the Executive Secretary to call the West Suburban Health Group, the next day, to request clarification on the March 31st deadline, and determine if the Town could either withdraw at a later date with 90 day's notification or ask for an additional 30-60 days to explore the Town's alternatives prior to the June 30th date.

8:25 p.m. Mrs. Holland joined the meeting at this time.

Mr. Eldridge voiced his concern of the proposed budget overall percentage of all departments as some of the departments such as the whole budget line for the Executive Secretary is for salaries only. He expressed that certain mandated services in the town have to be provided for. Mr. Sonnett said that Mr. Kozak would make the recommended budget cuts that pertain to General Government. The Board discussed the override amount. It was agreed to present one amount for the voters and, if necessary, to come back with a Special Town meeting in June, should the original override amount fail. Mr. Sonnett said that the Board would discuss the Fire, Police, DPW, and School Department's budgets at the next Selectmen's meeting. Mr. Clark asked if the voters would be faced with another potential override next year. Mr. Sonnett responded that this years \$3.8M override should be all that the voters would be faced with. Mr. Eldridge agreed with this comment.

FY 2004 Proposed Budget Reductions Discussion (see attachments)

Mr. Sonnett asked the Police Chief, Fire Chief, DPW Director and School Superintendent to give an overview of their Department's proposed "shadow" budget reductions that would assist in meeting the proposed \$3.8M override. Chief Irvin said that he would have to lay off six out of 20 officers, including a school resource officer. Chief Daugherty said that he would have to lay off five out of 22 firefighters. Chief Daugherty said that the department is already below the recommended population ratio. He added that layoffs in his department would mean long response times to emergencies. Both Chiefs believe that town safety would be compromised if the potential override does not pass.

Dr. Phelan said that up to 65 teachers, including teacher assistants, and others such as administrative support staff and maintenance workers would be cut, if the override fails to pass. Dr. Phelan also accounted how various programs would be greatly impacted, such as music, sports, language, and physical education. Dr. Phelan also reported that the class sizes would increase as high as 10 students per class.

Mr. Gaucher reviewed his proposed budget reductions and said that the public works would have to lay off four out of eleven employees. Mr. Gaucher expressed concern regarding the departments' ability to maintain the roads, sidewalks, drainage repairs and snow removal efforts.

Mr. Kozak reviewed the General Government Fiscal Year 2004 proposed budget reductions. There was expressed concern by members of the Board of Selectmen of the layoffs of personnel from the safety department and school department and discussed how it would affect the community. Mr. Sonnett said that the Board would vote at the next Selectmen's meeting on April 1st, whether or not to ask voters to approve a tax override.

9:30 p.m. Police Chief Irvin, Fire Chief Daugherty, and Dr. Phelan left the meeting at this time.

Use for Legal Assistance Request: Board of Health

Ms. Peters presented the Board of Health's request for use of legal assistance of an environmental attorney with specific experience in environmental law. The request is for an as needed basis. She explained that if environmental issues come up, the Board of Health could consult the attorney. Ms. Peters said that the Board of Health's 53E½ account would pay for the service. The legal assistance requests states that the Board of Health would request use of Town Counsel for all other matters not pertaining to environmental issues.

When asked why the Board of Health couldn't use Town Counsel for these issues, Ms. Peters responded that Town Counsel, Attorney Faiman, recommended that the Board of Health speak to the Conservation Commission's legal attorney. Mr. Sonnett questioned if the Conservation Commission is in violation of the Town's legal assistance policy and asked Mr. Kozak to research the legal assistance policy that pertains to the Conservation Commission.

Mr. Clark questioned if the 53E½ account could be used for legal services. Ms. Peters said that the Town Treasurer Collector, Mrs. Dwinnell, believes that the Board of Health can use the 53E½ Account and that is what the Conservation Commission is doing.

Ms. Peters commented that Town Counsel does not practice environmental law. Mr. Kozak said that the Town's policy for use of legal assistance requires approval by the Board of Selectmen.

Ms. Peters asked to modify the Board of Health's request to ask for four hours for Attorney Hall, an environmental attorney.

There was a question as to whether or not the Board should go into executive session to discuss this matter. Mr. Sonnett responded that this discussion does not warrant moving into executive session, as it is not about strategy, rather it is a request for general assistance. Mrs. Pratt commented that she believes this discussion should move into executive session.

Ms. Peters said that she would like to withdraw the request. Mr. Sonnett suggested to Mr. Kozak to call Attorney Faiman and ask him for a recommendation regarding the Board of Health's request. Mrs. Peters then asked for three additional hours' legal assistance for town counsel.

VOTE: Mr. Sonnett entertained a motion to approve the use of legal assistance for Town Counsel for one hour to discuss environmental issues. So moved Mrs. Pratt. Second Mr. Nelson. Unanimously voted.

Legal Assistance Request: Open Space Preservation Committee

Mr. Coolidge requests for an opinion/advice for one session for legal assistance relative to preparing the Purchase & Sales Agreement for the Phipps property located on Winter Street.

VOTE: Mr. Sonnett entertained a motion to approve the legal assistance request from the Open Space Preservation Committee, for an opinion and advice and one session, relative to preparing the Purchase & Sales Agreement for the Phipps property located on Winter Street. So moved Mr. Clark. Second Mr. Holden. Unanimously voted.

Parks & Recreation Commission Maintenance Fee Structure

Michelle Gates expressed the need for clarification of the proposed amount of \$75,000 to be raised by the Parks & Recreation Commission that would be put into the general fund. Mr. Sonnett said that the funds would be put into the 53E½ account. He explained that the DPW and School Department would maintain the fields, and the Parks & Recreation Department could collect a fee of \$20 from each child participating in recreation programs other than school related programs. Mrs. Gates expressed that if the Parks & Recreation is collecting fees for their programs, then she believes that the Commission should take care of the fields, also. Mr. Sonnett clarified the difference between collection of the \$20 fee that is for use of the field versus maintenance of the field, which would be done by the School Department and DPW. Mr. Clark pointed out that there is a critical difference between field use fees versus maintenance fees and that parents will need to know the services provided for the fee. There was discussion regarding what the \$20 maintenance fee includes such as lawn cutting, rubbish removal etc. Mr. Sonnett said that the Town (DPW) and School Department would bill the Parks & Recreation for the maintenance, which would then be paid for with the 53E½ Account.

Facilities Board Budget:

The Board agreed to discuss the Facilities Department's Budget at the next Selectmen's meeting.

10:50 p.m. Mr. Sonnett entertained a motion to adjourn the public meeting. So moved Mr. Clark. Second Mr. Holden. Unanimously voted.

Respectfully submitted,

Geri Holland

Clerk

Date Approved: 4/15/03