

TOWN OF HOPKINTON BUDGET COMMITTEE
Minutes of Meeting
Town, School District, Hopkinton Village and Contoocook Village Precincts
Wednesday, April 13, 2022 – 5:30 p.m.
Approved September 14, 2022

To view video recording of meeting go to: https://youtu.be/GGom_Eakg1k

BUDGET COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT

Committee Member	Attendance	Committee Member	Attendance
Don Houston	Present	Rich Houston	Present
Norm Goupil	Present	Mark Zankel	Present
Ken Traum	Present	Christa Scura	Present
Steve Reddy	Present	Deb Norris	Present
Jonathan Cohen	Present	Victoria Bram	Present

OTHER ATTENDEES

Maddie Houston, student. Observed meeting for Hopkinton High School civics class project.

CALL MEETING TO ORDER and PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mark Zankel called the Meeting to order at 5:31 p.m. The Committee recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mark Zankel introduced Victoria Bram and welcomed her as the newest member of the Budget Committee. Victoria represents the Hopkinton Village Precinct and on this date was also acting as the Minute Taker.

SELECTION OF HOPKINTON BUDGET COMMITTEE CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

Ken Traum motioned to nominate Mark Zankel for the office of Chair to the Hopkinton Budget Committee, seconded by Jonathan Cohen.

Mark Zankel asked for any other nominations. There being none, Mark accepted the nomination.

A vote was taken to approve Mark Zankel as Chair of the Hopkinton Budget Committee for the current term.

Committee Member	Vote	Committee Member	Vote
Don Houston	Approve	Rich Houston	Approve
Norm Goupil	Approve	Mark Zankel	Abstain
Ken Traum	Approve	Christa Scura	Approve
Steve Reddy	Approve	Deb Norris	Approve
Jonathan Cohen	Approve	Victoria Bram	Abstain

Ken Traum motioned to nominate Jonathan Cohen for the office of Vice-Chair of the Hopkinton Budget Committee, seconded by Norm Goupil.

Mark Zankel asked if there were any other nominations. There being none, Jonathan Cohen accepted the nomination.

A vote was taken to approve the motion nominating Jonathan Cohen as Vice-Chair of the Hopkinton Budget Committee for the current term.

Committee Member	Vote	Committee Member	Vote
Don Houston	Approve	Rich Houston	Approve
Norm Goupil	Approve	Mark Zankel	Approve
Ken Traum	Approve	Christa Scura	Approve
Steve Reddy	Approve	Deb Norris	Approve
Jonathan Cohen	Abstain	Victoria Bram	Abstain

APPROVAL OF PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 9, 2022.

Deb Norris motioned, seconded by Ken Traum, to approve the minutes of the Public Hearing dated February 9, 2022.

Mark Zankel asked if there were any comments or corrections needed. There being none, a vote was taken to approve the motion for the approval of the Public Hearing Minutes of 2/9/2022.

Committee Member	Vote	Committee Member	Vote
Don Houston	Approve	Rich Houston	Approve
Norm Goupil	Approve	Mark Zankel	Approve
Ken Traum	Approve	Christa Scura	Approve
Steve Reddy	Approve	Deb Norris	Approve
Jonathan Cohen	Approve	Victoria Bram	Abstain

TOWN FINANCIAL UPDATES – KEN TRAUM

Ken Traum gave a financial report of the Town budget beginning with revenues.

Ken noted that revenue is down by 25% due to the timing of block grants which come in closer to the end of the calendar year. He reported that vehicle fees are coming in higher than expected and could reach \$100,000 more than budgeted.

Ken stated the Town's expenses are higher than budgeted due to the timing of certain front-loaded costs including, worker's comp. insurance and debt service payments which have already been made for the year.

Mark Zankel asked for the timeline for completing the Barn bond.

Norm Goupil asked if there will be an interest rate cap.

Jonathan Cohen stated that the timing should be as soon as possible.

Ken Traum stated the timeline is this summer; the bond bank operates twice per year.

Jonathan Cohen asked if the celebration to be held on September 24th will be funded from the Hopkinton Police Department budget.

Ken Traum stated that he does not anticipate Town money to be involved. He noted that the event on 9/24 is being put on by the Contoocook Chamber of Commerce and the Police Officers' Association of Hopkinton.

Deb Norris asked if Ken had information about the tree in the center of Contoocook being removed.

Ken Traum asked Don Houston to address the question.

Don Houston stated that the tree will be replaced by a 6-8 foot tall transplant.

Steve Reddy asked who decided to take down the tree.

Don Houston stated that he was not present at the Contoocook Village Precinct meeting when the decision was made. His understanding is that this tree was too big to decorate. Don noted that a previous large tree was removed from the same spot because it blocked visibility of the intersection.

Jonathan Cohen asked if the tree was sick.

Don Houston replied that it was not.

Steve Reddy asked if the tree could have been pruned.

Norm Goupil asked for the names of the Contoocook Village Precinct Commissioners.

Don Houston stated that the Commissioners are Chris Boudette, Mike Metcalf and Tom Yestramski.

Steve Reddy asked if the event on September 24th is meant to replace the Strawberry Festival, which was very popular. Steve asked who used to pay for the Strawberry Festival.

Rich Houston stated that the Fire Department raised money for the Festival.

Victoria Bram stated that the Hopkinton Community Center used to manage the food and drinks at the Festival.

Mark Zankel asked for further questions. There were none.

HOPKINTON SCHOOL DISTRICT FINANCIAL UPDATE – Norm Goupil

Mark Zankel congratulated Norm Goupil and the School Board on a successful District meeting in March.

Norm Goupil thanked the Budget Committee for their work during the previous budgeting season. He thanked Mark Zankel for making the opening statement at the District meeting. Norm applauded the outcome of the School Board's enhanced communication plans.

Norm Goupil stated that prior to the Budget Committee meeting Rich Houston had inquired about the RFP's that are currently being advertised by the District.

Norm Goupil stated that as of March 31, 2022 there is \$527,000 in the unreserved fund balance. Due to the upcoming end of the fiscal year on 6-30-2022, quotes /bids are needed now to determine what to do and when. This is the window for the Superintendent to gather information on costs for landscaping, upgrades to the SAU office and a potential generator project at Harold Martin School.

Mark Zankel asked if these specific RFPs are for potential, currently un-approved investments which may be obligated by the school board by June 30th.

Norm Goupil replied yes. The Finance Committee of the School Board will make recommendations in May. Norm will bring information about what happened by 6-30-2022 to the next Budget Committee meeting in August.

Rich Houston asked why Harold Martin School needs a generator.

Norm Goupil replied that a generator may be needed for emergency fire suppression, but it is not yet clear if Harold Martin School requires one yet.

Christa Scura asked Norm to clarify.

Norm Goupil stated that the need for a generator depends on the probability of an outage at the School.

Mark Zankel asked if Harold Martin School has any solar power.

Norm Goupil replied no, not yet. Norm noted that sustainability is featured in the District's Strategic Plan.

Norm stated that the Building Committee of the School Board has been dissolved and that approximately \$406,000 is going back to the District. Norm stated that the CIP Committee will recommend putting the funds into capital improvement, specifically ongoing maintenance projects.

Deb Norris asked if the \$406,000 needs to be used within one year.

Norm Goupil replied yes.

Jonathan Cohen asked if the money could be put toward the boiler.

Norm Goupil replied yes it could. Norm stated that the money will go to existing, planned projects.

Deb Norris asked if the boiler project will include public discussions.

Norm Goupil replied yes.

Norm reported on personnel updates. The Superintendent has updated the District's practices for hiring and retirement. This year there will be at least 5 early retirements which provided flexibility in the budget for a new Curriculum Director position. The current HMHS Assistant Principal, Rebecca Gagnon, will take on the role of Curriculum Director. The new Assistant Principal has been selected and will begin in July 2022.

Deb Norris asked if all of the early retirements are being replaced to retain classroom sizes. She asked if the new Curriculum Director position will cost the Town more money in the long run for benefits, raises, insurance.

Norm replied no, there is no increase needed in the budget. The budget encompasses all salary and benefits. The Superintendent will fill the pending positions. Hopkinton School District postings generally garner many interested candidates. The two positions mentioned, HMHS Assistant Principal and Curriculum Director, received 31 and 17 applications, respectively.

Jonathan Cohen asked if there is likely to be the same level of enthusiasm for teaching positions.

Norm Goupil replied that not all of the early retirees were teachers.

Jonathan Cohen asked if class sizes are going to change.

Norm Goupil said class sizes will not go beyond an appropriate range of 16-20 students with 4 sections per grade.

Norm Goupil reported that the final edits to the District's Strategic Plan have been made and there will be a public meeting during which Rick Barnes, the Consultant, will make a final presentation to the School Board. After the Strategic Plan is approved by the School Board, Norm will present it to the Budget Committee.

Rich Houston asked about the cost per student of the recently-completed \$10 million building project at Harold Martin School. Rich asked how much capacity was added for the money that was spent.

Norm Goupil replied that four classrooms were added.

Rich Houston asked how much of the \$10,000,000 was spent on those classrooms.

Norm stated that he would bring the final project report to the Budget Committee once it is approved by the School Board.

Rich Houston stated that he received a question from a citizen about whether the District can add students into classrooms with excess capacity without increasing the budget.

Norm Goupil stated that there is a cost associated with every student.

Rich Houston asked what is the cost of building the four new classrooms divided by the number of students we can fit in the new space.

Norm Goupil replied that he will work with the Superintendent and staff to answer the question based on 4 classrooms with 20 children per classroom.

Don Houston asked how much the student population can grow to fill capacity and cover fixed costs.

Steve Reddy asked what is the theoretical number of children the District could accept into existing classrooms. Steve noted that there are less students in the public schools now than before COVID and it is unclear when or if some will return.

Rich Houston stated that the end of the building project is the right time to determine the cost of adding student capacity to our schools.

Don Houston stated that at the beginning of the project the estimated cost for each classroom was \$500,000.

Mark Zankel asked that Norm Goupil find out how much the per person cost was for the four classrooms.

Norm Goupil replied that he will find out and report back with the information. Norm noted that building materials are more expensive now than when they were purchased for the Harold Martin School project.

Deb Norris asked for an update on the adequate education funding lawsuit.

Norm Goupil replied that he will keep the Budget Committee informed when there is news.

Ken Traum stated that there is a Senate Bill which includes funding from the State of NH for 7 ½ percent of retirement for teachers, police and fire personnel.

Norm Goupil stated that if the bill passes it would mean \$525,000 per year for the district.

Jonathan Cohen stated concern for the effects of inflation on the upcoming budget cycle.

Norm Goupil replied that the recent passage of the teachers and support staff contracts help to keep costs predictable.

CONTOOCH PRECINCT FINANCIALS UPDATE – DON HOUSTON

Don Houston reported that the Town Clerk has been out of the office lately and so the most recent reports on revenues and expenses are delayed. Don will have updates at the next meeting in August.

HOPKINTON VILLAGE PRECINCT FINANCIALS UPDATE – VICTORIA BRAM

Victoria Bram reported that there was \$30,000 spent in the first quarter of 2022 on the Water System upgrade. Victoria will have more information at the next meeting in August.

Mark Zankel asked for public comments.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Don Houston introduced his granddaughter, Maddie Houston, who attended the meeting as part of a Civics class project at Hopkinton High School.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mark Zankel asked for any other business to come before the Budget Committee.

Ken Traum asked when the next meeting would be held.

Mark Zankel stated that the next meeting will be Wednesday, August 10, 2022 at 5:30 p.m. at Town Hall. Mark asked that any Budget Committee members who cannot attend that meeting please let him know.

Christa Scura stated that she received a question from a citizen regarding the Hopkinton-Webster Transfer Station. She requested a review of the Transfer Station's budget at the August meeting.

Ken Traum stated that the Select Board is planning to examine the details of the Transfer Station budget Ken will bring a report to the Budget Committee.

Don Houston offered congratulations to Mark Zankel for his presentation at the School District meeting. Don offered congratulations to the School Board for the transparency of the budgeting process. Don stated that the new Superintendent is doing well.

Jonathan Cohen stated that he was heartened by the support that the Town showed by voting to pass the teachers and support staff contracts.

Rich Houston asked that next year's School Report feature the per student costs.

Norm Goupil stated that the per student figures are in the 2021 School Report.

Jonathan Cohen stated that there should be a chart showing the figures over time.

Rich Houston said that at the District meeting two (2) figures were mentioned, \$23,000 per student with state funds, \$17,000 per student without state funds.

Mark Zankel stated that the Budget Committee would like to see the current capacity of each building and how far above or below capacity we are in each building.

Norm Goupil stated that the School Board set tuition rates this year at \$17,000 per student.

Rich Houston said that knowing how much it costs to add student capacity would help the Town understand the opportunity cost for adding capacity or changing ratios.

Deb Norris stated that the Superintendent's presentation at the beginning of the last budget cycle was positive. Deb asked if the Superintendent will be coming to a Budget Committee meeting again this year.

Norm Goupil replied yes, the Superintendent is happy to do it.

Christa Scura stated that it was helpful to be able to ask questions before budget season crunch time.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

Steve Reddy motioned, Jonathan Cohen seconded, to adjourn the meeting.

A vote of the motion to adjourn was held as follows:

Committee Member	Vote	Committee Member	Vote
Don Houston	Approve	Rich Houston	Approve
Norm Goupil	Approve	Mark Zankel	Approve
Ken Traum	Approve	Christa Scura	Approve
Steve Reddy	Approve	Deb Norris	Approve
Jonathan Cohen	Approve	Victoria Bram	Abstain

The meeting was adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Victoria Bram