

**HAMPDEN ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
REGULAR MEETING  
February 4, 2019  
Hampden Town House**

**Approved** February 11, 2019

Called to order at 6:00pm.

**Members Present** – Carol Fitzgerald and Doug Boyd co-chairs, Matt Fisher, Alan Fritts and Heather Turcotte

**Members Absent** – None

**Also Present** – Conservation Chair Bonnie Geromini, Conservation Commissioners Judy McKinley-Brewer, Tim Hanley, Ted Zebert and Andrew Netherwood, Town Clerk/Collector Eva Wiseman, Planning Board members John Matthews and Rick Green, Assessor Norman Charest, Town Accountant Cliff Bombard

**FY20 ATM Budget Process**

**Conservation Commission** – Bonnie reviewed the Commission's budget requests. They are requesting an increase in hours as current assistant is working over the allotted hours. The commission feels that with the increase in hours the department needs could be better met. Bonnie stated that since having someone in the office for expanded hours she no longer must use a sick or personal day from her job to come in to take care of departmental issues. Each Commission member spoke to the request for more hours in the department and the increased reporting that was now required. Carol reminded the commission that they had come before the personnel committee previously and Ted responded that last year they had been told to 'keep it down' and not to ask for everything at once. Carol asked for clarification about the duties and hours and if the requested hours were to do the volume of work and correct the backlog. Ted explained that it was a little bit of each. Bonnie has found that surrounding towns, Palmer, Monson and Wilbraham have full time staff. Doug stated that it's apparent to him that the era of the small town is over, there are so many demands and Andrew expounded on the backlog and complexity of the projects including the fact that the assistant is also the point of contact for consultants and is already working over her hours most weeks. Ted pointed out that even if solar slows down, with water/sewer and traffic lights on the horizon all of that will involve the Conservation Commission. Doug asked about revenue and Bonnie replied the money received from NOI's goes into their small revolving account. Carol asked if the commission had any conversations with the Selectmen and Ted replied that he had spoken with John Flynn. He added that their budget was so small compared to that of the Police and Fire departments. Doug commented that they should budget what it takes, what the actual work involves, if it had been budgeted over the years and Ted interjected that he had asked the Selectmen last year for a part time funded Conservation Agent. Bonnie went on to say that it had been a long time for little hours in the office. Andrew added that the request doesn't mean that the hours can't come down at some point and Tim added that they are trying to be realistic about what their current needs are. Carol asked if they will be over their clerical line, (yes) and what the plan was for dealing with that.

**Town Clerk/Tax Collector/Registrar** – Eva opened with letting the committee know that the elections budget was going down by half and that she had money coming back from the state. The Collectors expense has an increase of \$250 since she no longer has a revolving fund to use. She confirmed that she is still using the 'jail' for printing and other supplies when she can. Doug asked if the RAO had settled down and Eva explained that the RAO must comply with requests, and that the election information is still steady. Since the State now wants electronic formats, she has combined two positions duties into the RAO. She is expecting an early voting reimbursement of \$1100 and Doug asked if that was 100% and Eva replied that it covers pretty much everything except the mandatory equipment and advertising (\$987) On the Collectors side Eva is anticipating an increase to the computer maintenance line – she already had a buffer in case work was needed but now that we have an IT she should be okay. Any increase would be for any additional components added.

**Planning Board** – John Matthews explained that they would like to increase the admin hours from 16 to 21 since she has been using 5 hours from her position as ZBA admin for planning. Carol asked if ZBA would

decrease and John answered that it would not. Rick Green briefly detailed the department activity and the long range plans they are looking at including eliminating spot zoning and cleaning up the business zoning. He went on to say that they are also looking at the water/sewer project in the hope that it will free up some land area to expand Centennial Commons for more affordable housing units. Both men remarked that a lot of hours are being spent on solar and Doug asked if we were getting revenue. John explained even though we have quite a few solar fields, that the state is now trying to push solar into the eastern part of the state. Carol asked about the citizens committee and if there was a goal or plan to get to ATM with a presentation. John stated they are trying to improve the current bylaws and keep with what they state really wants. Carol asked who the chair was and Rick responded that it is Donna Hatch and that the planning board is the conduit to keep the project moving. John mentioned that large scale solar systems need decommissioning plans and the possibility of long range water/sewer. Matt asked if they were short selling themselves and if they needed more hours and John replied that they did not. Carol asked if the extra hours could be rolled up into the budget and John replied that he would like to keep those extra hours separate. Alan Fritts asked if there was a plan to use DIF financing for the water/sewer project and John replied that he didn't know and that they would be sticking with the planning aspect of the project.

**Assessors** – Norman explained that the three assessors had calculated a 2.5% increase on their salaries and Doug asked why not the 4% to which Norman replied that they felt there was more clerical shortage than there was with the board's salaries. While the 4% was added to the clerical position, they feel they may be lagging behind other communities on the principal assessors' salary. Carol explained that there would be an analysis versus the current market and if adjustments needed to be made they would be – Heather asked when this would be done and Norman answered it wouldn't happen prior to ATM and might take until STM. Norman continued his budget review stating that on the expense side everything remained the same with just an increase to their software. He went on to say they used a different calculation with the salary figures adding the three extra days that would fall in FY2020 along with hours for training. Doug asked if there were any state funds for that required training, (no). Alan questioned if some years were heavier on assessments than others and Norman explained that every property was visited once every nine years and that they tried to see about 200 every year, (there are approximately 1800 homes in town) He went on to say that next year they are planning on visiting 225 homes so that there will only be a small amount of home left to visit in year nine. Doug stated he felt that the department has become much more professional over the past several years.

**Accountant** – Cliff informed the committee that in 2020 the audit for 2017-18 will be held. He reviewed his budget lines for UMass training for certification and software licenses. He presented what he referred to as a large number for an assistant accountant to be hired. Someone is needed to help with warrants, verification of receipts, vacation coverage and other issues, ie legality of a submitted bill, tax rate setting information, and state reports filings. Whoever they hire cannot work another town office and he would prefer to hire an assistant accountant from a surrounding community who would already have municipal experience. Doug asked about hours and Cliff replied that this is just a placeholder for now. Cliff went on to say that we will have free cash in the fall and that the first motor vehicle excise was more than he had estimated. Doug informed him that the committee was seeing substantial requests for increases this year. Cliff closed with the fact that there would be no OPEB audit this year.

### **Previous meeting minutes**

*Carol made a motion to approve the January 28th meeting minutes as amended, Matt seconded, all in favor 5-0*

*With no further comments or discussions, Carol made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:51 p.m. Heather seconded, all in favor 5-0*

Respectfully submitted,

Cindi Connors, Admin Asst