

Town of Hudson Finance Committee
Town Hall
78 Main Street, Hudson, MA 01749

Minutes of the Meeting of April 21, 2020

The meeting was held remotely via Zoom, <https://bdev.zoom.us/j/247317042>. The meeting was publicly posted. It was held in conformance with the Governor's Executive Order of March 12, 2020, suspending provisions of the Open Meeting Law, M.G.L. Chapter 30A, Section 20, which required meetings to be held in a public location.

Members present: Rob Clark, chair; Guy Beaudette; Sam Calandra; Andy Horvitz; Andy Massa, Shawn Sadowski; and Steven C. Sharek, vice-chair.

Also present: Tom Moses, Executive Assistant; Tricia Fay, Finance Director; Dr. Marco Rodrigues, Superintendent of the Hudson Public Schools; Patricia Lange, Executive Director of Finance and Operations, Hudson Public Schools; Dr. Glenn Maston, chair, Hudson School Committee; Steve Smith, vice-chair, Hudson School Committee; Hudson School Committee members Michele Tousignant Dufour, Matthew McDowell and Nine Ryan; Lisa Louis, Hudson school parent; Bob D'Amelio, Hudson Planning Board member; Fire Chief Bryan Johannes; and two other individuals who did not identify themselves.

The chair called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

7:01 p.m.

Approval of Minutes of April 8, 2020

Mr. Sadowski made a motion to approve the Minutes of April 8, 2020. Seconded by Mr. Horvitz. Vote in favor 7-0.

7:02 p.m.

Budget Review – School Department

Dr. Rodrigues gave a brief overview of the School Department's budget request. Committee members then proceeded to ask questions about particular aspects of the budget and operations of the School Department.

Mr. Massa asked Mr. Moses whether the Town needed to redo its budget in light of the coronavirus pandemic and anticipated revenue shortfalls. Mr. Moses said it was too soon to make adjustments. Mr. Massa then asked Superintendent Rodrigues about the status of the School Administration building, potential staff layoffs, and online learning for students. Dr. Rodrigues noted that the Department only learned today, April 21, 2020, that Massachusetts schools would not be reopening this school year. He said the last scheduled day of school would be on June 22, 2020. Dr. Rodrigues said no decision had been made about the School Administration building. He said there had been no layoffs. He said Hudson was following state guidance on distance learning. This discussion ended at 7:38 p.m.

In answer to questions from Mr. Sharek, the Superintendent said Hudson only received about \$75,000 from the new Student Opportunity Act. He said he had been told that the state was not planning any cuts in the current FY 2020 budget. However, cuts might occur in the FY 2021 budget. Dr. Rodrigues said the state received \$512 million in federal Stabilization Funds which may lessen the impact of state

revenue shortfalls. He said if any layoffs are involved, the process would be “complicated”. This discussion ended at 7:53 p.m.

Mr. Sadowski asked whether the School Department would be seeing a reduction in its transportation expenses because school buses were not being used. Dr. Rodrigues said school departments are currently discussing that issue with their bus companies. This discussion ended at approximately 8:00 p.m.

Mr. Calandra asked the Superintendent a series of questions about the budget process; the Special Education Circuit Breaker; staffing, including district-wide support; per pupil spending and benchmark data; Special Education out-of-district transportation costs; funding for the Special Education Stabilization Fund authorized at a recent Town Meeting; fixed transportation costs and *force majeure*; grants and grant writing; and added busing for the Dual Language Program at Farley Elementary School. This discussion ended at 8:30 p.m.

Mr. Horvitz asked about capital projects, including the School Administration Building; establishing later start times at the high school; and giving Assabet Valley Tech more access to eighth graders who might be interested in vocational education. As a parent of a third grader in the Hudson Public Schools, Mr. Horvitz said he was disappointed in the lack of remote learning taking place at his child’s elementary school. The Superintendent indicated he would look into it.

In answer to a question from Mr. Clark, the Superintendent said the \$5 million figure included in the Capital Plan for the School Administration Building was only “aspirational”.

Mr. Sharek asked whether the School Department could present its budget to the Finance Committee at an earlier date next year. Dr. Rodrigues said the Hudson School Committee approves the school budget in late March. A meeting with the Finance Committee could be scheduled soon after.

Mr. Sadowski said he was disappointed that Hudson students were not getting a chance to hear from Assabet Valley Tech about the benefits of a vocational education. He said the School Department should allow Assabet to make presentations to eighth grade students in the Hudson Public Schools. This discussion ended at 9:07 pm.

Mr. Sadowski made a motion to approve the School Department budget in the amount of \$40,152,132. Seconded by Mr. Beaudette. Vote in favor 7-0.

9:08 p.m.

Discussion of Future Budget Action by the Finance Committee

In light of large anticipated revenue shortfalls at the state level, the chair asked Mr. Moses to explain the budget process for the coming year.

Mr. Moses said the Town would probably need to revisit the entire budget, probably during the summer. He said it would make sense to reconvene the Finance Committee after more is known about the FY 2021 state budget, but not earlier. Right now, the state is looking at potential revenue shortfalls of \$2 billion-\$6 billion.

He said the state may need to cut Local Aid (for cities and towns) and Chapter 70 (for schools). In addition to state revenue shortfalls, he said local revenues (including real estate tax revenues) may be reduced. He said health insurance costs also may be much higher than initially projected.

For the fiscal year starting July 1, Mr. Moses said the Town would probably implement a spending freeze and hiring freeze.

Town Meeting is currently scheduled for June 22, 2020. If the Town is unable to adopt a budget, it can operate on a "one-twelfth budget," monthly budgets approved by the state and based on the FY 2020 budget.

In answer to a question from Mr. Beaudette, Mr. Moses said the Finance Committee would be called back to start reviewing budgets, probably in August. Instead of cutting its budget, Mr. Moses said the Town may be able to draw down its reserves to cover revenue reductions.

Mr. Moses ended this discussion by saying "there are many moving parts right now."

9:25 p.m.

Adjournment. There being no further business, Mr. Calandra made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Horvitz. Vote in favor 7-0.

Minutes prepared by Steven C. Sharek