

Hingham Advisory Committee Meeting
Thursday, February 5th, 2026, at 7:00 PM
Town Hall, 210 Central Street, Third Floor, South Hearing Room

In Attendance: Carol Tully, Chair, Kevin Freytag, Vice Chair, Ted Ciolkosz, Secretary, Brenda Black, Ben Burnham, John Germain, Jerry Seelen, Steve Pohl, Brian Stack, David Leiphart, Elaine Cusker, Michael Herde, Mary Power

Absent: Alan Macdonald, Tina Sherwood

1. The Chair called the Advisory Committee meeting to order and read the following statement. This meeting is being held remotely/or in person as an alternate means of public access pursuant to Chapter 2 of the Acts of 2025 and all other applicable laws temporarily amending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law. You are hereby advised that this meeting and all communications during this meeting may be recorded by the Town of Hingham in accordance with the Open Meeting Law. If any participant wishes to record this meeting, please notify the chair at the start of the meeting in accordance with M.G.L.c. 30A, § 20(f) so that the chair may inform all other participants of said recording.
2. Budgets – Dispatch / SSRECC (South Shore Regional Emergency Communications Center) presented by Town Administrator Tom Mayo, Chair of SSRECC oversight committee (four total representatives, one per Town). SSRECC serves the Towns of Hingham, Hull, Cohasset and Norwell. Annual budget allocations vary as they are based on two metrics, Town population and call volume. The total requested budget is \$1,090,100. Michael Herde made the recommendation for the requested budget.

Public Safety & Utilities budget presented by Katie Dugan covers three main expenses consisting of \$400,000 for water specific to fire hydrants, \$132,000 of electricity to power traffic signals and a smaller amount of \$20,000 allocated for custodial services at the new public safety facility. The total budget request for public safety utilities is \$673,347, representing a 3% increase in expenses.

The Police Department budget presented by Chief Jones and liaison Steven Pohl. The police department's total budget request is \$8,422,345, which includes personnel wages of \$7,925,000. Steve Pohl clarified that the FY26 numbers don't reflect the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) as it was retroactive to FY26 in addition to the use of Article 4 money. It was also noted overtime is budgeted higher to account for staffing shortages and contract changes, and Chief Jones commented the new Headquarters in the Public Safety Facility Building has positively influenced officer morale and recruitment. The facility is state-of-the-art and has become a tool for attracting new hires. The department aims to fill open positions to reduce reliance on overtime and explore structural changes to manage overtime better. However, the Police Department still faces challenges with staffing due to civil service restrictions. A potential warrant article at Annual Town Meeting aims to remove the Hingham Police Department from civil service to broaden recruitment options given there are currently 9 open positions and 3 long-term disabilities currently affecting staffing levels.

Animal Control budget was presented by Chief Jones filling in for Officer Leslie Badger along with liaison, Elaine Cusker. Animal Control has diverse responsibilities encompassing general

animal control and policing as well as conducting barn and kennel inspections, the capture of animals, wild animal response as well as law enforcement duties, and last year received 493 calls for service, issued five citations and conducted seven kennel inspections. The recommended budget for Animal Control is \$111,303, which is a 7.9% increase from last year. The increase is attributed to step increases and the expansion of hours from 35 to 40 per week.

South Shore Country Club (SSCC) budget presented by SSCC Executive Director Kevin Whalen, George Kay and AdCom liaison Mary Power. As a reminder the SSCC is self-supporting, primarily funded by golf-related activities generating about 85% of the revenue with the remaining 15% from the bowling alley and the restaurant, leased to Ironwood, which pays a monthly fee. The budget also includes plans for capital improvements (including having the pool open June 2027) and operational adjustments, and reflects a 3% increase in expenses, totaling around \$2.5 million. Personnel services account for 51% of the total budget. Of note, the bowling alley remains a vital part of the Country Club's revenue, generating approximately \$150,000 annually, with vibrant league participation. While the bowling alley equipment is 75 years old and aging, upgrades are planned to maintain operational efficiency. Also, efforts are being made to improve revenue from the golf simulator room, which has seen a decline post-COVID. The recommended budget for the South Shore Country Club is \$2,450,456.

Director of Assessing Erin Delaney presented the Assessor's Office proposed budget of \$436,703 with liaison Steven Pohl. Assessing is responsible for property assessments and tax bills including motor vehicle and boat excise taxes with a focus on improving transparency and education. The budget reflects a 1.9% increase in wages due to step increases and retirements. An additional request for part-time employee hours is being considered to support departmental needs. The department aims to educate residents about tax exemptions and property assessments.

Harbormaster Ken Corson with liaison Elaine Cusker presented the Harbormaster budget with a requested amount of \$446,834. The budget includes a significant increase in training costs due to new training requirements, however, 75% the training is covered by grants from the Dept. of Homeland Security with the Town responsible for only 25%, and the majority of the Harbormaster Dept. salaries are covered by the Waterways Fund. A Port Security Grant of \$990,000 is being pursued to replace aging equipment and enhance safety measures.

The Fire Dept. Budget was presented by Chief Steve Murphy and Deputy Chief Lou Lachance with liaison Ted Ciolkosz. As with the Police Dept. a new Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) was negotiated, and the Fire Dept. contract would run to June 30th, 2027. Wages were increased by about 10.8% due to grade step position changes, and paramedic and training stipends were added to the budget as well as adjustments to overtime pay (a projected increase of 12% due to COLA adjustments). Total proposed budget is \$9,139,262.15 with mainly flat expenses of \$800,237 and personnel services of \$8,339,025.15. A robust discussion was had around ambulance service, and it was noted that if the Town switched to a private ambulance service, it could lose revenue and need to reduce firefighter staffing. Maintaining the same level of firefighting services would require increased funding due to the loss of ambulance revenue.

Additionally, Chief Murphy alerted the Advisory Committee that previously covered ambulance supplies by South Shore Hospital (such as linens, medication, etc.) are not expected to be covered moving forward due the Hospital's own budget constraints which could add about 110k to the Hingham Fire Dept. expenses. Lastly, like the Police Dept., a proposed warrant article for

ATM would ask that the Fire Dept. be taken out of civil service to help address the Dept.'s own staffing challenges and broaden the pool of recruitment candidates.

Weir River Water System budget with Russ Tierney and liaison Ben Burnham was presented next. The Weir River Water System (WRWS) is an enterprise fund with expenses of about \$15,211,382 and revenue of about \$15,541,151 which is paid by the ratepayers. A 3% rate increase is being requested in addition to a \$65 level charge to help pay for a needed new water tank and other infrastructure/maintenance. As of July 1st, 2026, HMLP will take over billing for WRWS at significant savings for those services under the Veolia contract. Total budget is \$15,211,382.

Sewer Dept. budget presented by Russ Tierney and liaison Jerry Seelen. The Sewer Dept. is technically a revenue fund, not an enterprise fund, but does pay for itself similarly to an enterprise fund. Total budget, including capital outlay funding, is \$4,680,151.80, with a significant portion allocated to MWRA charges and about \$224,752 toward personnel. Several infrastructure projects are planned to enhance the efficiency of the sewer system such as new pumps being installed at the Donner Ave pump station to replace outdated equipment. A five-year plan for pump station improvements is in place, with a focus on reducing infiltration and inflow (I/I) issues and the Sewer department is also actively working on metering and monitoring systems to better manage flows and identify leaks. Also, HMLP could take over Sewer Dept. billing by July 2027 to realize additional cost savings.

3. Liaison Updates – In an effort to engage the community in discussions about the new Hingham Center for Active Living AdCom will host a series of three discussions focusing on utilization, the operational budget, and financial impacts on taxpayers. The first meeting is scheduled for the 12th, with a focus on utilization and programming. Public comments will be limited to ensure focused discussions, with an emphasis on hearing from a diverse range of community members.
4. Housekeeping – Many letters have been received regarding the HCAL and a new folder has been added to the dropbox titled “letters from the public” for easier dissemination to Advisory Committee members. Jerry Seelen asked what the deadline is for Warrant Articles. While not yet known it could be by March 20th.
5. Motion to Adjourn - A motion was made and seconded to adjourn - the following members of the Advisory Committee voted in favor of the motion: Kevin Freytag, Ted Ciolkosz, Brenda Black, Ben Burnham, John Germain, Jerry Seelen, Steve Pohl, Brian Stack, David Leiphart, Elaine Cusker, Michael Herde, Mary Power

Respectfully submitted by Theodore D. Ciolkosz, Jr., Secretary