

Town of Haverhill
SELECTBOARD SB2 PUBLIC HEARING MINUTES
Tuesday, February 13, 2024, 6:00 p.m.
Robert E. Clifford Memorial Building

Select Board Present:

Members Joe Longacre, Rod O'Shana, Kevin Knapp, and Carolyn Hofmann. A quorum was met.

Town Employees Present:

Brigitte Codling, Town Manager
Jennifer Boucher, Assistant Town Manager

Members of the Public Present:

Darwin Clogston
Howard Hatch
Tom Mangels
Regis Roy
Vickie Wyman
Jay Holden
Lynn Graham
Judy Harris
Gordy Harris
Dave Joslin

Members of the Public Online:

Janice Dube
Joanne Young
Lorraine Prescott
Alex Nuti-de-Biasi
Robert Maccini
Henry Hossinfeffer
Heather Bryant
Rover Newman
Matthew Bjelobrk
Marilyn Blaisdell
Skip Gadwah
Aaron Palm

CALL TO ORDER

Vice Chair Longacre called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m. He reviewed the procedure for the meeting. He noted the Board chair is home sick, and encouraged people to stay home when they are sick.

ATTENDANCE/ROLL CALL

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

AGENDA APPROVAL

MOTION #1: K. Knapp moved to approve the Agenda as written. C. Hofmann seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: A roll call vote was taken. O'Shana – aye, Knapp – aye, Hofmann – aye, Longacre – aye. The motion passed unanimously.

ENTER PUBLIC HEARING

MOTION #2: K. Knapp moved to enter into a public hearing. C. Hofmann seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: A roll call vote was taken. O'Shana – aye, Knapp – aye, Hofmann – aye, Longacre – aye. The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING ON SB2

Vice Chair Longacre explained the reasoning behind holding a public hearing to discuss the possibility of Haverhill transitioning to a SB2 Town Meeting town. He described the process of voting under SB2 and how it would differ from the current process.

Ms. Codling discussed the differences and similarities between a traditional Town Meeting town and an SB2 Town Meeting town. These include the requirement that SB2 towns must produce a traditional budget and then a default budget, should the traditional budget fail. The default budget does not include a number of things that are in a traditional budget. She explained changes in the timing of the SB2 process. She shared a list of SB2 official ballot towns in New Hampshire as of December 31, 2020.

J. Boucher described the default budget and how it is derived.

Vice Chair Longacre asked for public comment.

Jay Holden said Haverhill is not an SB2 town. He said the current process is functioning well and does not need to be changed. He is concerned that the deliberative session will not be well attended, so a few people will be making decisions for the entire town. He is also concerned that the deck could be stacked by those who do attend. He said the Town Meeting allows for debate on issues. He said if people do not attend the deliberative session, there is no debate. People will be uninformed and could rely on unreliable sources for information. He hopes this measure is not supported by the voters.

Lynn Graham agreed with J. Holden. She said there has been an epidemic of the spreading of misinformation for the past four years. She asked why the Town would consider switching to this format, where people could be less informed. C. Hofmann noted many people do not attend meetings currently, and she feels this system would encourage more participation. There was a spirited discussion about this. L. Graham said the handout says less people may attend the deliberative session and be less informed, so she wants to know why the Town wants this.

Tom Mangels said he appreciates the tradition of the Town Meeting and feels it is probably the closest thing to direct democracy that exists in the country. He said there is a small timeframe in either form of government for people to express their opinions and cast their votes. He said a significant difference with SB2 is that even if he cannot attend the deliberative session, he has the opportunity on ballot day to vote. He noted there are people who cannot attend Town Meeting and so cannot vote. He believes overall participation would be greater with the SB2 system. He said there might be less of an intimidation factor than there can be at Town Meeting. He noted the advantages of a default budget.

Judy Harris asked about the number of voters. B. Codling said there are usually approximately 700-800 votes for a non-presidential election and over 2,000 for a presidential election. J. Harris asked how many people attend the Town Meeting. B. Codling said typically between 200 and 500 people attend.

Darwin Clogston said Town Meetings are not what they used to be. He noted issues with people trying to speak at Town Meeting and questioned how democratic that process is. He said it is not fair that people from out of town are not allowed to speak, when they have knowledge that is needed to make a decision. He urged everyone to do their own research, to avoid the spread of misinformation.

Lynn Graham said if she is unable to attend the deliberative session, she will not be able to participate in making amendments or provide input. She said at Town Meeting, when amendments are being made, people have a voice.

Jay Holden asked how many of these sessions have been held and how many people attended. B. Codling said there have been four public hearings in the last two years on the SB2 process. Earlier this year, five people attended the hearings. She noted they have handed out hundreds of documents regarding the SB2 process in the last two years. J. Holden asked how many registered voters are in the Town and was told 2,522.

Regis Roy said she has attended many meetings in town and very few people attend. However, more people attend the Town Meeting. She is concerned that few people will attend the deliberative session and make amendments that will affect the entire town.

In response, R. O'Shana noted the deliberative session will be recorded and posted online. There will be 30 days to view the video, digest the information, and do research. He recommended people talk to and listen to their neighbors. He pointed out the SB2 documents have been available for a couple of years. He noted at Town Meeting, when people are waiting in line to speak and the question is called, their voices are not heard. He said this does not seem very democratic. He believes it is good for the voters to have the opportunity to debate.

Gordy Harris asked how many people watch the broadcasts of the public hearings. B. Codling said numerous elderly residents tell her they appreciate the ability to watch meetings online. He said he hopes people will watch the recordings, if they can't attend meetings in person.

In response, R. O'Shana described the resources elderly citizens have to participate in this process and obtain information. B. Codling said there are often more participants attending meetings online than are present in person. Up to 300 people have logged in online, depending on the topic of discussion.

Vickie Wyman said she doesn't believe changing to an SB2 process is the answer to getting more participation. She believes the Town needs to find a way to bring everyone together, whether it is at a deliberative session or a Town Meeting. She said passionate people attend the Town Meeting and discuss topics, and that is the way it should be.

Regis Roy asked if people can participate in meetings that they are viewing online. B. Codling explained people must be present to participate.

A resident asked if this was the last hearing before the issue is voted on and the Board said it was.

EXIT PUBLIC HEARING

MOTION #3: K. Knapp moved to close the public hearing. C. Hofmann seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: A roll call vote was taken. O'Shana – aye, Knapp – aye, Hofmann – aye, Longacre – aye. The motion passed unanimously.

ADJOURN MEETING

MOTION #4: K. Knapp moved to adjourn the meeting at 6:43 p.m. C. Hofmann seconded the motion.

Voice Vote: A roll call vote was taken. O'Shana – aye, Knapp – aye, Hofmann – aye, Longacre – aye. The motion passed unanimously.

Zoom Recording:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/rec/share/J9aWDrRhw9sZevjlkjaQgc6qrL-WY9io3a4IVoBmXm9UA8G6iDegu1WmPTpSdsI9.K1PwWTOXIMarjUTJ>

Passcode: PbwdwG4Q

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Hanggeli