

Hanscom Area Towns Committee (HATS)

November 19, 2020 Minutes

Pursuant to notice duly filed with the Town Clerks of HATS member towns, the HATS meeting convened in a meeting via a recorded video conference November 19, 2020 at 7:05 pm as allowed by Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law.

Present: Select Board Members Emily Mitchell, Bedford and HATS Chair; Jonathan Dwyer, Lincoln; Linda Escobedo, Concord and assigned Clerk for this meeting. **Absent:** Select Board Member Suzie Barry, Lexington. **Guests:** Mike Kennealy, Massachusetts Secretary of Housing and Economic Development; Glen Kernusky, Hanscom Air Force Base Community Relations Representative; Anthony Gallagher, MassPort Community Relations Representative; and Molly Bourke, Secretary of Housing and Economic Development Office. **Public Participants:** Kate McEleaney, Concord; Sandhya Iyer, Lexington; Tanya Gailus, Concord; Sheela Page.

Welcome and Announcements

Ms. Mitchell welcomed participants noting that this meeting is being recorded by the Town of Bedford and Bedford TV. She announced that Ms. Barry was unable to attend due to a scheduling conflict with Lexington's Special Town Meeting.

Minutes

It was unanimously voted by roll call to approve corrections to the previously approved February 18, 2020 minutes, and to approve the June 18, 2020 minutes as amended as well as the September 17, 2020 minutes.

Future Meeting Dates

Ms. Mitchell announced that Representative Ken Gordon, 21st Middlesex District, is scheduled for the January 21, 2021 meeting. It is hoped that a representative from MassPort will be available for the February 18, 2021 meeting.

Update

Glen Kernusky, Hanscom AFB Community Relations Office representative, reported that business is as usual at the base while all are operating under Phase 2C, defined as a 2-week lag behind State and national Covid-19 regulations and protocols. The visitor center is open during normal business hours; however, there is reduced capacity and it will be partially closed at the end of December. Mr. Dwyer inquired about the number of Covid-19 cases at the base. Ms. Escobedo asked if there was any early feed-back he could report for the environmental study being conducted at the base. Glen Kernusky indicated he would seek responses to our questions and send the information to us.

Anthony Gallagher, MassPort Community Relations representative, reported that there are significant revenue shortfalls (at one point 90% lower than last year) and that work force reductions are forthcoming. There are current town representative openings for the MassPort Advisory Committee and encourages towns to find appropriate representatives. Activity at Hanscom is down but not to the same degree as business at Logan. Year over year, travelers at Logan as of 8 weeks ago were down from 45 to 12 million for 2019 and 2020 respectively. This was compared to 8-10 million travelers in 1974.

Recent Municipal Highlights

Concord – Ms. Escobedo commented that the bridge over Route 2 to connect the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) between Concord and Acton is expected to be complete by 2022. There is also high interest in connecting Concord's section of the BFRT to the Reformatory Branch of the Minuteman Trail which extends through Bedford. There are likely, however, to be multiple groups, pro and con, who will weigh in on this discussion including commuter bikers, recreational bikers, environmentalists, Great Meadows preservationists and walkers.

The feasibility and design study for a new middle school in Concord was paused earlier in the Covid-19 cycle due to concerns about accessing sufficient community attention and feedback. Efforts to complete this phase were recently reinitiated with consideration given to the current favorable borrowing and construction cost environment.

Lincoln- Picking up on that note, Mr. Dwyer reported that a recent water bond for \$1.2million was obtained at an interest rate of .094%! He also announced that Lincoln's conservation director has just retired and candidates are invited to apply for the vacant position. Tonight is the third night of Lincoln's State of Town Meeting where community discussion is solicited on various topics the town is considering for town meeting. Among the topics being discussed are electricity aggregation, revitalization of South Lincoln near the train station, and the establishment of shoulder lanes. Attendance has been between 130-80 on any one given night. Additionally, Mr. Dwyer commented that they were pleased to see the conceptual design changes for Route 2A, construction to be completed by 2024 in advance of the Battle Road 250 celebration in 2025.

Bedford – Ms. Mitchell reported that Bedford is seeking legislative relief to cancel its caucus which occurs early in January. The Bedford Select Board recently certified its tax classification and reviewed its capital budgets. The town is keeping to its regular town meeting preparation schedule as though it will occur in March, though likely it will be delayed again until May due to the pandemic and regulations for size of gatherings. The town received a racial equity grant which will result in a year-long process of consultant supported discussions with staff and the community around issues of racial diversity and equity and how municipal functions are responding to the same. Ms. Mitchell commented that Bedford has conducted a comprehensive review of its committee and board structures. Committee members whose terms are concluding and who wish to be reappointed were asked to evaluate what is working, what can be improved, and for their recommendations for the direction a specific committee should consider for the next three years.

Guest: Mike Kennealy, Secretary of Housing and Economic Development

Ms. Mitchell welcomed Secretary Kennealy, and he in turn thanked HATS for the opportunity, noting his own Lexington connection!

The Secretary opened his comments by referencing the late October announcement by the Baker-Polito Administration and his office of a new \$774 Million Economic Recovery Plan to address the real economic challenges that the Commonwealth is dealing with as a result of the impact of Covid-19. Prior to the pandemic and shutdown in March, the state was experiencing a high rate of growth (3%), the addition of 200,000 jobs under the Baker-Polito Administration., and otherwise the economy was doing well. All this changed with the pandemic shutdown. In May, things began to reopen but it was clear that an economic recovery strategy needed to be crafted which resulted in the Partnerships for Recovery Plan announced October 22, 2020.

Partnerships for Recovery supports five key recovery efforts:

- **Getting Massachusetts back to work**
- **Supporting small businesses**
- **Revitalizing downtowns**
- **Supporting housing equity and stability**
- **Fostering innovation**

Secretary Kennealy highlighted each of the recovery effort categories with the following comments.

Support for small businesses - early capital funds opened up \$54 million dollars to assist the hardest hit small businesses. Drawing on federal and state funds, small businesses will be offered technical assistance to access grant programs and loans. The strategy has been to use State capital to fill in gaps with Federal funding and to facilitate access to \$18 million Federal funding.

Revitalizing downtowns - additional funding will be available for the Shared Streets and Spaces Program. Which focuses on outdoor economic opportunity and development. Lexington and Bedford have already received grants for this purpose. More funding is available for local recovery planning grants for cities and towns as they work to revitalize their main streets and business districts for the long term.

Fostering Innovation – The Commonwealth needs to provide relief to our businesses and skills training investments to keep innovations driving our economy forward. Referenced were the positive role that the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, and Massachusetts Life Sciences Center, and MassVentures play in our economy. There are more than 90 companies working on vaccines and therapeutic related products. Access to capital will be critical. The Secretary is excited about advance manufacturing opportunities for the state as businesses rethink their access to supply chains.

Getting People Back to Work – Need new investments to build workforce skills. Currently, unemployment is under 10%. A work force skills cabinet has been working on solutions to get people back to work for some time but now has shifted its attention to the hundreds of thousands unemployed workers who will need advanced skill training to re-enter the job market. How do we grow skills in advanced manufacturing as an example? How do we retrain those who may face permanent unemployment? Additional funding will be requested for Career Technical Institutes, vocational technical schools, and cooperative high school programs to help close the skills gap for skilled technician jobs and align training to industry needs. This, along with other strategies, will require legislative action in an economic development recovery bill currently being considered.

Housing Equity – There has mostly been a lack of adequate housing production in the last 30 years (half as much as the previous 30 years), resulting in increased housing prices and number of units that has not met the significant population growth in the state. Massachusetts has the highest rental cost for a 2-bedroom apartment in the country. Direct investment and targeted zoning are needed. Additionally, an eviction diversion program is particularly needed during this recovery period for equity and stabilization of housing and a \$171 million initiative is proposed for this purpose.

Following this overview, the Secretary entertained the following questions.

Q-Mr. Dwyer asked how John Beede’s role on the Military Asset and Strategy Task Force intersected with the strategy for economic recovery.

A – Hanscom is an important partner in economic development and recovery as they focus on multi-domain operations and acquiring technical resources on the cyber security side. John is part of the team that is helping bases with their economic development strategy.

Q – Mr. Dwyer also asked if some of the projected funding for the Career Technical Institutes, schools, businesses is to finance adults for retraining?

A- There is deep regional planning to link regional education resources with business needs and then workforce skills development.

Q- Ms. Escobedo asked if housing choice initiatives were likely to be acted on this session.

A -Secretary answered he was hopeful that this would be included in the legislation.

Q- Ms. Escobedo asked how difficult it will be to reach the hardest hit populations with access to job retraining.

A-The Secretary clarified that 200,000 to 400,000 could be left without employment after Covid-19. We are tracking this by industry and have to reach the hardest hit areas.

Q-Ms. Mitchell commented on how excited everyone is that Ultragenyx Corp. is coming to Bedford. She asked what the trends and trajectories are for Life Sciences.

A-I’ve already referenced that there are 90 companies working on vaccines and therapeutics in the state. I am also hopeful about the growth potential of testing techniques, and

biomanufacturing. There are growing clusters in Lexington/Bedford, Worcester, the Berkshires. All these make Life Sciences a statewide opportunity.

Q- Ms. Mitchell stated that child care is a necessity and really infrastructure; the reopening phase has highlighted this. It is essential to understanding equitable access for the underemployed.

A-The Secretary commented that another able commissioner is addressing these issues and acknowledged the role child care plays in economic development. Child care centers need to be included for small business grants.

Q-Ms. Mitchell noted the tensions in our communities between schools and businesses reopening and asked how this is being prioritized.

A-Most of the covid-19 spread problems have been caused by gatherings which the Governor has addressed with size of gatherings regulations. Most businesses have done a great job adopting the protocols and changes in this regard.

Q-Ms. Iyer from the Economic Development Dept. in Lexington asked if the state is encouraging Life Science businesses to move out of Boston/Cambridge.

A-Traffic congestion and cost most likely are influencing the companies to make location moves. Many companies are thinking about footprint and office configuration and where people are located, particularly after our collective experiences of virtual workspace during this pandemic.

At the conclusion of the questions asked of Secretary Kennealy, Ms. Mitchell and the other Select Board representatives thanked the Secretary for his informative presentation and willingness to meet with us to discuss the State's important Partnership for Recovery Program.

With business concluded for the evening, it was unanimously voted by roll call to adjourn the meeting at 8:10 pm.

Meeting minutes written by: Linda L. Escobedo