

2016 History

January

Low for the month was Jan 26, 24F; high was 57F on 17th.

Hamilton seeks partner, relief for dispatch services

Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle

Jan. 21, 2016 - When an emergency arises, the cost of your 911 call is usually the last thing on your mind.

But the services coordinating an emergency response don't come cheap, totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars annually even for small towns like Hamilton and Wenham.

The two towns have taken different tracks to providing these services over the past five years, but now Hamilton is looking to reassess their dispatch model to trim the \$350,000 annual cost.

Town Manager Michael Lombardo said his office is considering potential partnerships with neighboring communities to regionalize their dispatch services, but who those partners could be remains to be determined.

"Our first preference would be for other jurisdictions to join (our service)," Lombardo said. "That's not borne fruit. It's time for us to look at all our other options."

Some of communities contacted by the town manager's office include Wenham, which partnered with the Essex County Regional Emergency Communications Center (RECC) in 2012, and Danvers, which is renovating its police headquarters and modernizing its dispatch technology.

Previously Hamilton and Wenham shared the cost and operations of dispatch services following the construction of a dispatch center at the Hamilton Public Safety Complex almost a decade ago.

Lombardo said Hamilton handled the day-to-day operations of the center, and Wenham cut a check for service annually.

Under the prior arraignment, Hamilton benefitted from a \$148,000 annual grant from the state's 911 Department in addition to Wenham's \$122,000 contribution.

That funding diminished significantly since Wenham became a member of the RECC, slashing the state grant to just \$24,000.

"It's a challenge," Lombardo said. "We sure hate having to give up that (localized) service, but we still have to look at ways of providing dispatch services to the community at a good cost."

Lombardo noted Hamilton has attempted to curb the cost in other ways, such as eliminating one dispatch position and leaving a dispatch supervisor role unfilled, but the burden still remains.

The dispatch services are considered part of the Police Department's annual budget and have a staff of four full-time civilian dispatchers. These dispatchers report to HPD's command staff. Hamilton's dispatch service can theoretically handle servicing up to four communities.

Wenham Town Administrator Peter Lombardi said Wenham had just received Lombardo's suggestion to reunite the towns' dispatch but the topic hadn't yet been discussed by the Board of Selectmen.

"We really aren't anywhere near a place where we'd entertain that right now," Lombardi said.

He said Wenham opted to join the RECC in 2012 as a cost-saving measure. Wenham pays the regional dispatch service about \$82,000 annually, a rate of about \$16.25 per resident.

Wenham entered into a 10-year contract for RECC's services upon signing up. Lombardi said the town could theoretically exit the contract after five years and upon giving the RECC a two-year notice.

Other communities who are members of the RECC include Amesbury, Middleton, Topsfield, and Essex. The RECC also provides dispatch services to all cellular 911 calls. The dispatch center itself operates out of Middleton and has an annual operating budget of about \$5 million.

Danvers Town Manager Steve Bartha said he and Lombardo have had some "preliminary discussions" about uniting their dispatch services potentially at the renovated Danvers Police Station.

Danvers Town Meeting in 2014 approved a \$5.5 million renovation of the town's dispatch service and the police station itself. Construction is expected to be finished later this year.

Similar to Hamilton, Danvers is now looking for local partners to chip away at the cost of providing dispatch.

"I think our goal is to get some technical expertise as we look at how to do that," Bartha said. "Dispatch is becoming very modular. We're building a workspace that could accommodate more than Danvers would need for itself. Our goal is to find a partner, because we'll be providing dispatch (service) with or without them."

Although local partnership opportunities remain in flux, Lombardo said he remains unimpressed with the service offered by the RECC thus far and wouldn't suggest Hamilton become a member in the future.

"The approach they've taken with that center has been the wrong approach out of the gate," Lombardo said. "We've identified a lot of operation shortcomings... Nothing has happened as of yet that would make us want to go there at the present time."

Lombardo cited dissatisfaction with services among member communities and what he believes is an ineffectual model for dispatchers to take calls. Additionally, he attributed some of the state's dwindling 911 Department grant in an attempt to support the RECC since it also handles cellular 911 calls statewide.

"The state can only prop that up for so long," Lombardo said.

Bartha also said his community rejected joining the RECC previously, saying the costs of the program "raised red flags for us."

The most notable of those complaints by local communities is an ongoing legal battle between the city of Beverly, one of the original partners for the regional dispatch service, and the RECC.

Beverly Mayor Michael Cahill and Essex County Sheriff Frank Cousins, whose department manages the RECC, are divided over contractual obligations and fiscal responsibility.

The sheriff's department claims the city is on the hook for more than \$1 million in financial liability for fiscal years 2015 and 2016 while Beverly contends the RECC failed to provide their contractual services. The city is currently pursuing legal action against the Sheriff's Department.

Shad Ahmed, executive director for the Essex County RECC, countered Lombardo's claims stating the service provided by RECC only continues to improve with time.

Specially, he noted the center is heading towards a two-person call taker with dispatcher partner model, allowing a more accurate and personalized dispatch service.

He also noted each community's dispatch services are custom tailored to an individual budget and level of need among other criteria, outlined through a feasibility study.

"It's a customized solution," Ahmed said. "We feel everybody should be able to enjoy the services we offer here. We're always happy to have that conversation with (interested) communities."

Advantages of the RECC include an extensive staff of 34 dispatchers, along with nine supervisors, and the ability to coordinate emergency response among multiple towns more efficiently.

“You get better situational awareness,” Ahmed said. “(We) can provide better intelligence, better information to police and coordinate from town to town.”

Ahmed noted neighboring states, such as New Hampshire and Maine, have operated with a regional model for years, and the concept continues to gain a foothold nationwide.

“Regionalization works all across the country,” he said. “The way we like to present (our service) is looking at other models and how that works in other states and other regions.”

Although dispatch services aren’t going to dissipate due to cost alone, Lombardo said local partners will be necessary to sustain the cost going forward, especially in order for Hamilton to maintain local control over its services.

“In terms of service delivery, I’d put our dispatch up against any (others),” Lombardo said. “(But) I have to be constantly looking at ways of delivery service to the town in a cost effective manner.”

April

Hamilton-Wenham Chronicle

Annual Town Meeting

Annual Town Meeting for Hamilton wrapped up after four hours of extensive debate and discussion.

Although a majority of the 22 warrant articles passed, two articles were passed over and voters amended one part of the Community Preservation budget.

Hamilton’s overall \$28.4 million town budget, including the appropriation for the Hamilton-Wenham Regional School District, passed by majority along with most other articles relating to the town’s finances or operation.

A total of 233 voting residents attended, a 4 percent voter turnout, but lower than last year’s Town Meeting turnout of 589 voters.

Affordable Housing Trust allocation

Town Meeting voters amended the Community Preservation Committee’s (CPC) budget request to appropriate \$250,000 for the Affordable Housing Trust (AHT) to specifically bar the allocation from going toward a development idea, tentatively named Miles River Village, unless approved at a later town meeting.

The development has only come before a handful of committees and has not formally begun the permitting process.

Harborlight Community Partners, a non-profit developer and manager of lower-income housing primarily in Essex County, is currently purchasing land beyond the end of Longmeadow Way to develop 108 units of rental housing.

“We do not have control of the whole site, which is why we haven’t been public about it,” said Andrew DeFranza, executive director of Harborlight.

In a follow-up interview with the Chronicle, DeFranza said the 108 units would be constructed in three phases over the next decade, starting with units for families before shifting to senior apartments.

“We understand people have a lot of questions, and they should,” DeFranza said. “We’re happy to talk with any question they might have and any concerns they might have.”

He again stressed the development idea has not gone any further than the initial discussions and Harborlight is still working on securing remaining parcels for the proposed site.

Proponents of the amendment said the project could potentially come before the town to request the money under the category of creating affordable housing.

They also complained the town has already begun discussion about the project without more public transparency, citing an appearance by Harborlight at an AHT meeting last fall to talk about the project.

“I appreciate certain (housing) needs but not this,” said Kate Walker, the resident who proposed the amendment.

Members of the CPC, AHT, and others against the amendment argued the money was strictly a replenishment of the Affordable Housing Trust account after a handful of projects last year.

Additionally, they said, none of the money has been set aside with any particular projects in mind.

“This is really simply a transfer to the Affordable Housing Trust,” said Tom Catalano, CPC chairman.

The amended article passed with 98 yeas to 91 nays.

All other allocations in the CPC budget passed, including \$44,647 for the design of a field renovation at the Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School and \$25,000 towards the construction of a playground at the Winthrop Elementary School.

No significant changes to zoning pass

Voters at Town Meeting chose to take no action on a proposed rewrite of the zoning bylaw as well as passed over a citizen’s petition to place the power of site plan review into the Planning Board rather than the Zoning Board of Appeals.

The Planning Board recommended the town pass over the proposed zoning bylaw changes, saying the board had yet to fully vet the changes and felt further review and public hearings are necessary before adoption.

“We haven’t been able, in fairness to you, prepare (these changes),” said Jeff Melick, chairman of the Planning Board.

The changes are part of an ongoing revision by Hamilton’s town government to bring the existing zoning bylaws into better compliance with both state law and common practices.

The citizen’s petition, meanwhile, wasn’t acted upon due to what Town Moderator Jennifer Scuteri and Donna Brewer, town counsel, classified as a procedural error.

Specifically, they said the language used for the petition allowed it to appear on the warrant but would not allow the change to be legally recognized.

“Procedurally, you had to have the Planning Board approve specific language,” Scuteri said in a follow up interview.

Proponents of the petition said they do plan to return to the topic either through a special town meeting or at future annual town meeting.

“We’re not dropping it, just postponing it,” said Gretel Clark, one of the petitioners.

Scuteri said she would work with the petitioners, as well as any other citizen petitions, to ensure they’re submitted correctly.

“Going forward we will have a better process,” Scuteri said.

April 7

Hamilton elections

Rainy weather contributed to a low voter turnout in Hamilton and Wenham for their respective Town Election on Thursday, April 7.

A total of 814 Hamilton voters made it to the poll.

The Hamilton Board of Selectmen had a three-way face-off over two seats. Incumbent Scott Maddern held onto his seat with a total of 479 votes, but will be joined the next board meeting by

Allison Jenkins, who secured 498 votes to defeat fellow candidate Rosemary Kennedy, who collected 435 votes.

The Hamilton-Wenham Regional School Committee, which both towns vote on, included four candidates vying for three possible seats, each lasting for a three year term, and one uncontested for a single seat lasting one year to fill an unexpired term. In the race for three-year seats, incumbent Jeanise Bertrand held onto her seat with 591 votes. David Polity and Michelle Bailey also secured seats on the board with 717 and 731 votes, respectively. Richard Boroff collected 514 votes.

Deb Evans, who was running for the one-year seat to fill an unexpired term, collected 862 votes in an uncontested race.

July 5

Planning Board gains site plan review authority

A large turnout of 342 voters attended special Town Meeting. Voters approved to shift the site plan review authority from the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) to the Planning Board.

The citizen's petition to change the authority of site plan review from the ZBA to the Planning Board was the lone article on the warrant. The vote passed by a clear majority according to Town Moderator Jennifer Scuteri. A two-thirds majority vote was required for the article to pass.

For comparison, annual Town Meeting in April drew 233 voters and special Town Meeting last November brought in 336 voters.

Site plan review gives the reviewing board and the Hamilton community input into development projects throughout the town, typically through a collection of restrictions called conditions. These restrictions can include building footprints, design features and hours of operation. Site plan review cannot outright halt a development, and builders can challenge conditions through the Massachusetts Land Court.

Aug. 26, 2016

Albert Dunlap Coonrod, the town's oldest resident, 100, husband of Ruth Lovering (Day) Coonrod, with whom he shared 69 years of marriage, passed away in the home he built. He was born in Savoy, Illinois on July 27, 1916,

August 30

Hamilton Facebook

Trash Pickup Halted, Search is On for Replacement

Hiltz Waste Disposal will longer pick up trash, recycling and organics in Hamilton – effective immediately – as town officials also deal with puddles of either oil or hydraulic fluid that may have possibly been left on the streets by trash trucks.

Town employees are investigating the situation but if anyone notices a puddle of fluid on the street, they are asked to contact Town Manager Michael Lombardo via email

Hiltz leaders told Lombardo that it is dealing with the problem of their employees not showing up for work. Hiltz officials notified Lombardo on Wednesday that they will no longer be able to pick up trash in Hamilton due to the employee shortage.

"I'm scrambling to find a company to fill in and see what legal remedies might exist," Lombardo said.

While the search for a new company is active, Lombardo said he doesn't yet know when, or even if, another vendor is available. Lombardo is working together with Wenham Town Manager Peter Lombardi because the trash pickup contract – which is out to bid now – is jointly signed with Wenham.

It will be impossible to have another company do the pickup on Wednesday, so Lombardo has asked residents to take in their trash until further notice.

Drought

During August, temperature in Hamilton was a 90 or above 7 days and it rained 7 days, with total amount being 2.4 in. The most rain, 0.97 in., was on Aug. 22. The historic average rainfall for August is 3.46.

Aug. 31, 2016

Salem News

Hiltz dumps trash routes

Hiltz Waste Disposal of Gloucester abruptly notified several North Shore communities Wednesday that it would no longer provide their trash and recycling collection services after that day's pickups were completed.

The announcement left cities and towns including Swampscott, Hamilton, Wenham, Gloucester and Manchester scrambling to reach deals with new vendors and find a temporary solution.

"It's a shame that a company could go downhill so fast and leave the community in a lurch," said Michael Lombardo, the town manager of Hamilton. "We have had Hiltz for decades."

Lombardo said he had a conversation with Deborah Hiltz, a representative of the company, Wednesday morning that the trash hauler could not get enough employees to do their Hamilton route.

The company was ultimately able to send a crew to the town before the end of the day, said Lombardo, who said he has no confidence Hiltz will be able to pick up trash in town in the future.

Sep. 21, 2016

Edna Barney, the town's oldest resident, died in the morning at her home on Bridge Street. Edna, who was born on New Years Day in 1917, was the eldest child of George and Ethel Sprague.

Sep. 23, 2016

Hamilton's Board of Selectmen approved all trash, recycling and compost to be collected on a weekly basis.

October 31

Salem News

Habitat for Humanity begins first Hamilton project

Habitat for Humanity has started work on its first project in Hamilton, creating two new, affordable homes that should be ready by fall of next year.

The group is demolishing a home at 270 Asbury St. and will replace it with two, two-bedroom homes. The homes will be energy-efficient and designed to match the character of the neighborhood.

The Habitat project is just one of the ways Hamilton hopes to add to its affordable housing stock. The town is currently considering a location for an affordable housing development to be built by Harborlight Community Partners.

Preston said Habitat began work last January to secure the land on Asbury Street. With the help of the town's Affordable Housing Trust, Habitat was able to buy the rundown property.

So far, volunteers have come from Tabernacle Congregational Church in Salem and Endicott College. This weekend, students from Harvard and Brandeis universities were scheduled to help. Habitat is also receiving help from Essex Tech students in the school's arboriculture program, who have assisted with tree removal.

When complete, one of the homes will face Asbury Street, and the other will face Lincoln Street. They will be near Cutler Elementary School and within walking distance to downtown.

Family selection will begin early next year, and families will be able to get application information on the Habitat website. With two bedrooms, Habitat will be able to consider a couple or single parent with children of the same gender, or a young couple taking care of an elderly parent. The chosen families will be able to weigh in on paint colors and other decor for the homes, which will meet standards for access set by the Americans with Disabilities Act on the first floor.

For these homes, a family of four can have a combined household income of between \$39,000 and \$59,000 to qualify, he said.

The town is well under the state threshold of having 10 % of its housing affordable; failure to meet the threshold leaves the town open to large, 40B projects that can skirt local zoning laws. The town's 2013 Housing Production Plan said only 3 percent of its housing is subsidized, but an estimated 20 percent of households could be classified as low income.

Nov. 8, 2016

80% turnout for national election

The national election drew 4,756 voters, about 80% of Hamilton's registered voters. In 2012, there was a 78% turnout (4,529).

Hillary Clinton received 2,627 (55%) voters and Donald Trump gained 1,473 (31%) votes.

There were 4 ballot questions:

Legalize slot machines, **3,198 No**; 1,433 Yes

Increased aid for charter schools, **2,432 No**; 2,236 Yes

Improve farm animal confines, **3,854 Yes**; 830 No

Legalize marijuana, **2,373 No**; 2,312 Yes

December

Quiet end to the year.

So, what do we to expect this coming year?