Select Board Liaison to the Budget Working Group

Bob Espindola <bobespindola02719@gmail.com> Mon, Oct 26, 2026 at 10:34 AM
To: Select Board <selectboard@fairhaven-ma.gov>, Keith Hickey <khickey@fairhaven-ma.gov>

To: Fairhaven Select Board
Subject: Concerns Regarding the Role of the Select Board Liaison to the Budget Working Group

Dear Members of the Select Board,

I would like to express my concerns regarding the correspondence included on pages 44–54 of the October 26 Select Board meeting packet and the apparent extent of Mr. Rick Trapilo's involvement in directing the activities of the Budget Working Group.

First, I want to acknowledge Mr. Trapilo's dedication, initiative, and sincere commitment to identifying opportunities to improve the Town's financial position. His willingness to devote considerable time and energy to this effort is commendable.

However, I believe it is important to recognize the distinction between serving as a liaison and directing the work of an appointed committee. **Section 2-1(b) of the recently adopted Town Charter expressly states:**

> "Individual select board members shall not purport to represent the select board or exercise the authority of the select board except when specifically authorized by the select board."

The Charter further assigns administrative oversight of appointed committees to the Select Board as a body, not to individual members acting independently.

These provisions raise legitimate concerns about the extent to which an individual liaison may establish priorities, direct activities, or influence the work of an appointed committee without specific authorization from the full Select Board. **The responsibility for developing a work plan, evaluating alternatives, and formulating recommendations belongs to the Budget Working Group collectively, not to its liaison.**

I am also concerned about the implications for our department heads. Mr. Trapilo himself has previously spoken highly of their professionalism, dedication, and capabilities. They deserve our continued confidence and respect, particularly as they confront increasingly difficult budgetary challenges. Their expertise and cooperation should be integral to the Working Group's deliberations.

Similarly, Mr. Trapilo has repeatedly expressed his confidence in Town Administrator Keith Hickey and his management abilities. Section 2-2 of the Charter identifies the Town Administrator as:

> "the chief administrative officer of the town"

It further assigns the Town Administrator responsibility for managing and supervising departments under his jurisdiction, with specific exceptions for the School and Public Works Departments. This established administrative structure should be respected and not inadvertently circumvented through the activities of a Select Board liaison.

I fully support a thorough, independent examination of Town expenditures and opportunities for improved efficiency. However, that process will be most productive when the Budget Working Group is allowed to fulfill its assigned responsibilities, department heads are treated as valued partners, and the respective roles of the Select Board, its liaison, and the Town Administrator are clearly maintained.

I respectfully encourage the Select Board to reaffirm the limitations on individual members' authority established by the Charter and ensure that the Budget Working Group is allowed to carry out its important mission independently and collaboratively. I would, further, ask the Select Board to consider that the way this liaison position is being handled could set a precedent for any and all other liaison appointments in the future, potentially derailing the original intentions of the liaison position. Ultimately, I believe that the Budget Working Group, and, by extension, Fairhaven's taxpayers will be best served by respecting the established responsibilities of the Town Administrator and department heads. The Town Administrator, working with the appropriate department leadership and consistent with the Charter, should establish reasonable boundaries regarding what staff can and should be expected to do in support of the Budget Working Group's efforts. Those expectations should be guided by operational priorities, available resources, and the professional judgment of those responsible for managing Town services—not dictated by an individual Select Board liaison. This approach will encourage cooperation, preserve accountability, and still give the Budget Working Group the support it needs to produce meaningful recommendations.

Respectfully,
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