

## MEMORANDUM

April 12, 2021

To: Holliston Select Board

From: Holliston Stipend Committee

Re: Report summary and findings

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By Memorandum of February 8, 2021, the Holliston Stipend Committee (“HSC”) outlined its charter, methodology and findings to the Select Board. The outcomes in that document were partially based on faulty data, which came to light after the fact. As such, the HSC reconvened and re-verified all the data contained in its initial report. Based on the revised data and upon review of its initial charter, the HSC is prepared to render a recommendation that departs from its original.

### General statistics findings:

- In the identified peer universe (Governance Committee plus three: Hopkinton, Medfield and Hanover), 55% towns offer some manner of stipends to their elected/appointed boards. [10/18]
  - 70% of these towns offer stipends to their Select Board [7/10]
  - 50% of these towns offer stipends to their Board of Assessors [5/10]
  - 50% of these towns offer stipends to their Town Moderator [5/10]
    - 30% of these towns offer stipends to their Moderator only
- Surveys conducted by the Stipend Committee did not hold any statistically significant data upon which to base any conclusions. (38% response rate).

[Attached](#) to this memorandum is a spreadsheet reflecting the stipends offered, with the following summative data (the averages were calculated by excluding Holliston for comparison purposes):

- Select Board average stipend is \$1,316 (Holliston \$50)
- Board of Assessors average stipend is \$1,150 (Holliston \$2,500)
- Town Moderator average stipends is \$200 (Holliston \$0)

The Stipend Committee also affirms and states anew several universal truths:

- Every town struggles at times to fill volunteer posts, particularly those that are less visible.
- In Holliston, those individuals who volunteer do so in the name of service to the Town.
- Every board is a “working board” in Holliston, comprised of individuals who care deeply about the

community, and generously give of their time, energy, effort, and expertise in service to it.

- Several elected/volunteer boards meet throughout the workweek during usual business hours.
- It takes time and energy for any town's professional staff to acclimate new volunteers.
- There is value to continuity of service, i.e., once the volunteer comes up the learning curve, it well serves the professional town staff to have volunteers who are familiar with the laws, regulations, technicalities and nuances of their particular role.
- There is no statistical evidence that a stipend has any effect on the amount of effort or intellectual capital expended.
- There are no data-driven conclusions on whether offering remuneration has any effect on recruitment and retention of qualified and dedicated volunteers.
- Whether or not to offer stipends is a wholly subjective issue, and a matter of town legacy and budget priority.

In looking at the current stipend offerings in Holliston, the Memorandum outlined a basis upon which a stipend might be appropriate as an offering to the Board of Assessors; to wit: the one-week in-residence orientation program required for all newly elected members, held at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. No other elected board in town requires elected individuals to take a week away from their homes, work and families to fulfill their responsibilities to the town. As such, the Committee concluded that, should the taxpayers of Holliston choose to continue to offer a stipend, a calculation based on the average per capita salary in Holliston (adjusted for inflation), would be an appropriate approach to calculate a stipend. This training is a one-time requirement. The Committee did not opine on whether the stipend should be a one-time or annual offering.

In the intervening time, it has come to the attention of the Stipend Committee that newly elected members may engage with the required *Course 101: Introduction to Assessment Administration: Law, Procedures and Valuation* in a self-paced, online format. There are a total of ten modules to be completed with a cumulative exam at the end of the course, which requires at least a 70% to pass and receive a certificate of completion. According to the Department of Revenue, each module takes approximately one hour. Newly elected members have two years from the date of election to complete the course.

This requirement is similar to training of other elected boards, including the Planning Board, Finance Committee, School Committee, Select Board, and others. For other boards, there is no regimented training program, yet there is a learning curve associated with the laws, regulations and ordinances surrounding the particular area of content. This self-driven study is time consuming and necessary to fulfill the obligations of each oath of office.

In the February 8 Memorandum, the HSC stated it was unable to reach a data-driven, non-subjective answer to the overarching question posed to it: should Holliston offer stipends to otherwise volunteer or appointed committees/boards, and if yes, to whom and how much? While the Stipend Committee did not in its initial memorandum make a recommendation about the offering of future stipends in Holliston, it pointed out a differentiating factor which may deem appropriate a stipend to the Board of

Assessors. As this memo has laid out, changes within the last few years in the training requirement has made the Assessor training platform similar to that of many other key committee and board roles in Town.

There are two Boards in Holliston currently offered a stipend: Select Board and Board of Assessors. As outlined herein, the stipend offered to Holliston's Select Board is considerably lower than those of other towns, \$1,316 average versus \$50; and our Board of Assessors is a statistical outlier at \$2,500, which is more than twice the average stipend offered in other towns of \$1,150.

The HSC reaffirms that the question of stipends is a matter for the taxpayers to decide. Relying on data collection, common practices of similar towns, interviews, and survey results, the HSC finds that there is no differentiating factor that distinguishes any one Board from another in terms of dedication, intellectual capital expended, time spent, and expertise required prior to election and/or appointment. The offering of stipends in Holliston, much like many similar towns, is that of legacy and not another distinguishing factor that sets those Boards who are offered a stipend as more valuable so as to avail itself to a stipend. The HSC find that the offering of stipends, however large or miniscule, to any particular "volunteer" board over another is an inequitable practice, and should be phased out.

The Stipend Committee recommends:

- Ceasing the practice of offering stipends to any elected or appointed boards/committees in Holliston.
- Maintain the current stipend offered to those officeholders who ran for their current term with the stipend in place.
- Once the current term expires, no future stipends be offered to future officeholders.

We are grateful for the opportunity to have served on this Committee and welcome any questions or comments.

Respectfully,

Holliston Stipend Committee:

Shelley Bochner

Tom Dumas

Erica Plunkett

Joan Shaughnessy, Chair

Daniel Whynot

