

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
MINUTES DECEMBER 5, 2016
APPROVED**

BOS Members Present: John G. Petropoulos, Chair; Joshua A. Degen, Vice Chair; Barry Pease, Clerk; Anna Eliot, Member; Peter S. Cunningham, Member

Also Present: Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Mr. Petropoulos called the meeting to order at 7:00pm and reviewed the agenda.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Ms. Eliot said that it was hazardous waste week and that recyclables could be dropped off on Wednesday and Saturday at their facility on Cook Street in Devens.

Mr. Pease said that it was the first snow of the year and thought they were very fortunate to have a DPW that was out before the Town woke up to get the roads cleared.

Mr. Degen said he wanted to make a regrettable announcement and read the following statement into the record:

Citizens of Groton

Groton has been my family's home for a quarter century. While living here we have enjoyed our scenic and historic community very much. Some recent hate related events have occurred in our surrounding communities and has led to my cause of concern. These concerns then hit home when two weeks ago an event of hatred directly affected me. Someone that I have known, respected and considered a friend for twenty years walked in to a local business and saluted the owner and me with a Heil Hilter sign raised high and proud.

While we were both aghast at this event we must not lash out over it but teach about tolerance. We live in a community that embraces our commonalities. However, we must learn to respect those folks that hold beliefs that are both different and diverse. I personally don't care what color anyone is nor if they are Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Jewish, Hindu, Rastafarian, atheist or agnostic.

If we want to live together in harmony it begins with mutual respect. Too many atrocities have occurred worldwide because too many people stood as bystanders. This action or lack thereof allowed hate to proliferate. The Armenian genocide, the Rwandan genocide, the slaughter of Native Americans and the Holocaust just to name a few all occurred and were allowed to happen because too many people stood idly by as bystanders.

The time has come to for us to become upstanders and not allow these actions to occur in our great country. We are Americans, the melting pot of the world where freedom of beliefs is paramount. Therefore, it is incumbent upon each of us to be upstanders who will not tolerate hatred.

If you see or hear something confront the perpetrator and/or report it to the local authorities. If you stand by and take no action, then the ramifications could become much worse. I want our town and this country to truly be the land of the brave and the home of the free for one and all. This all begins with you my fellow citizens. So if you see something say something.

Thank you and happy holidays too, no matter what your beliefs may be.

Josh Degen

Ms. Nicki Rockwell said that she had taught at the middle school for many years and worked on the penny project in the Middle School lobby during her time. She said that 1.5 million Jewish children were involved in the Holocaust and were represented by those pennies. She said that they needed to try to never forget. She said it was helpful to see that the Board had a way to call on things as they happened and keep a log of them. She said it was horrifying to think someone would think this was funny. Mr. Petropoulos said that the Town could not do everything but added that three weeks ago, they acknowledged they would like to do something. He said he was going to be meeting with Mr. Haddad, Chief Palma and one other resident to see what they could do to spread a message that Groton accepts all later that week. Mr. Richard Lewis from Old Dunstable Road said that they had to remember they had only been in this country a short time and that they wanted to love together peacefully.

SENIOR CENTER ANNUAL REPORT

Present: Gail Chalmers and Kathy Shelp

Ms. Gail Chalmers introduced herself as the Chair and referred to the COA's mission statement. She said that they had offered 90 different programs in 2016, something they should be really proud of. Ms. Chalmers after highlighting other key accomplishments over the past year, thanked a number of organizations that provided support to the Council on Aging including Mr. Cunningham for all his support and guidance as their liaison. She said that their ongoing needed were in a constant change.

Mr. Cunningham said that the services provided were significant and done in a cost-effective manner to the Town. He said that their budget was less than 1% adding that a key feature was the number of volunteer hours that were provided at the center. Ms. Shelp said that they did a lot of programs in conjunction with the Library adding they were running a new pilot program in the spring where they offered van service in the evening so that senior residents could attend evening programs at the Library. She said that this was being funded by the Library Trust.

Mr. Degen said he thought they were doing a great job adding that people using the services were grateful. He said that they had a huge senior population in Groton and thought they really needed to address the Center. Ms. Shelp talked about the hearing devices she obtained by means of some grants. Ms. Eliot asked if housing was an issue. Ms. Shelp said that they had limited knowledge adding that some Towns had 3-5 year waiting list which was a problem nationwide. She said that those that lived-in Groton wanted to stay there but the shortage was everywhere. Ms. Eliot asked how they Board could help them. Ms. Shelp said it was no secret that they would like nothing more than support with their project adding that a new or renovated Center was needed badly. She said that housing would need to be addressed someday too. Mr. Degen said that he and the Town Manager were looking at new senior affordable housing opportunities in Groton. Mr. Petropoulos asked how large their senior population was. Ms. Shelp said that those 60 and older were around 2,400 seniors adding that the average age that a senior attended the center was 75 which was also the same as the national average. She said that about 800-900 seniors came through the doors this past year adding that others utilized their services other ways. Mr. Petropoulos said that they should encourage their senior to stay in Groton adding that he saw a lot of reasons they needed to be supportive of them.

Mr. Jack Risdon said he attended Talk with Tom last week where they talked about the idea of moving the Senior Center to Prescott. He said that the Center was in a great place where it was and if they could acquire the land in front that belongs to the EMS, there was more room for growth.

FOUR CORNERS SEWER PROJECT UPDATE

Mr. Haddad said he had received a request from the four corners neighborhood for an update on the project. He said that there was concern they were not kept in the loop about the grant application. He said that on November 18th Secretary Ash came out to Groton to award the Town with a \$2M grant to construct a sewer system. He said that the 2015 Spring Town Meeting had approved them to move forward with this initiative. He said that the only change to this year's application was the addition of a business partner, Southcoast Development. He said that Southcoast had purchased the former Wong property and had recently taken over the management of the Shaw's plaza. He said that they had tried to speak to National Grid about their property on Sandy Pond Road but had had no success with that. Mr. Haddad said that any changes to any of the approved plans had to be brought before the Planning Board adding that the abutters would be notified through site plan review. He said he had heard of no plans to change any of the other sites within the approved sewer district. He said that the Town would be going out to bid within the next few weeks on the construction and hoped to start construction in February and end sometime in July. Mr. Haddad said that the residential lot located on the "4th corner" was not included in the district. Mr. Cunningham said that the connection to the homes on Robin Hill were also included in the district and voted on at Town Meeting. connections to home on Robin Hill. Mr. Cunningham said that the only new news was that the Town received the grant. Mr. Degen said he was sorry the residents felt they were not kept in the loop but added that nothing had changed. Mr. Degen asked if the Sewer Commission would be managing this. Mr. Haddad said that they would adding it would be a separate district.

Ms. Leslie Lathrop said she felt blindsided by the announcement and was concerned about construction. Ms. Lathrop said it was time to put something civic down their end of the Town. Ms. Eliot mentioned maybe putting a polling location in that area. Ms. Eliot also suggested that the neighbors provide a contact person to Land Use Director to be made aware of any changes to plans that had already been approved. Mr. Haddad said that directional drilling would be used in Groton. He said that the only digging would be done on the roads in Ayer. Mr. Haddad said that most of the work would be down Sandy Pond Road adding they were not allowed to block the road or hinder school children from getting to school. Ms. Linda Deciccio of Boston Road asked about the 16 acres of National Grid property. Mr. Haddad said that Southcoast Development had tried to talk to National Grid but they were not responding to them as of yet as far as he knew. Mr. Frank Castellucci of Sunset Lane said that they didn't want this project to be any larger adding they liked their neighborhood the way it was. Ms. Lathrop asked about the possibility of a gas station being allowed there. Mr. Degen said that the properties were located in the water protection district and therefore could not be allowed.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad said that the Trails Committee had recommended that Dan Patnaude be appointed to the Committee and asked the Board to consider ratifying his appointment.

Mr. Pease moved to affirm the appointment of the Town Manager of Dan Patnaude to the Trails Committee. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion adding the term would end on June 30, 2017. The motion carried unanimously.

2. Mr. Haddad said that the employment agreement with Chief McCurdy was due on June 30, 2017. He said that according to Section 1 (B) of the agreement, the Selectmen may renew the agreement for a three (3) year period. He said that they had two more meetings to discuss this if the Board wanted but added his recommendation would be to renew the Chief's contract for three (3) years. He said that the Chief had done a phenomenal job. Mr. Cunningham said that he concurred with Mr. Haddad adding that thanks to the Chief's leadership, morale was high within the Department. Mr. Degen said that the Chief had done a great job with leadership and he had no problem moving forward with negotiation discussions. He asked that a salary review be obtained by the Personnel Board. Mr. Haddad said he would need the Board to vote to notify Chief McCurdy that they agreed to enter into negotiations for a 3-year contract subject to negotiations. Mr. Pease said that Chief McCurdy was an incredible change for this town from what he had heard adding he would be in favor of entering into negotiations. Ms. Eliot and Mr. Petropoulos agreed.

Mr. Degen moved that the Board of Selectmen authorize the Town Manager and a negotiating team, to include two (2) members of the Board of Selectmen, offer Chief Steele McCurdy the opportunity to negotiate a new contract for three (3) years. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion.

Mr. Degen withdrew his motion.

Mr. Pease moved that the Board of Selectmen notify Chief McCurdy that they intended to enter into negotiations to renew his contract. Mr. Cunningham seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Degen said he thought the negotiating team should be limited to the Town Manager and two (2) members of the Board so it wouldn't be so cumbersome. Mr. Petropoulos said that the HR Director should work with the Personnel Board to come up with a salary survey. Mr. Degen volunteered to be on the negotiating team. Mr. Petropoulos suggested that Mr. Pease also be involved.

Mr. Petropoulos moved that they have Mr. Pease and Mr. Degen work with the Town Manager on this negotiation. Ms. Eliot seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Mr. Haddad said that he had completed his review of the recent Fiscal Year 2017 Property Assessment Revaluation and drafted a report of his findings. He said that he received input from the Principal Assessor and Assistant Assessor, and two of three members of the Board of Assessors. He said that one member was not able to provide input adding he would like to allow the opportunity for that member to do that and bring it back for discussion at the next meeting. Mr. Cunningham said he wanted to make clear that he and Ms. Eliot were not against this report being done and wanted to correct what had been reported in the local paper. Mr. Degen said he wanted to hear this report prior to the Tax Classification hearing. Mr. Haddad said that they could open and continue the hearing to have this discussion. Mr. Degen said that this was a confidential report at this time. Mr. Petropoulos said it would be redacted before being released adding the draft was not a public document at this time.
4. Mr. Haddad said that one of the goals of the Board was to delegate one member of the Board to work with one member of the Finance Committee to review the Financial Policy by December 31, 2016. Mr. Green said he had no problem with suggestion adding the Finance Committee was posted to discuss this at their meeting the following night. Mr. Cunningham said he would like to work with Mr. Haddad and the designee from the Finance Committee on it. Mr. Petropoulos asked for Board members to send any suggestions they had.

Mr. Degen moved to appoint Mr. Cunningham to work on this. Mr. Pease seconded the motion. The motion carried 4-0-1 with Mr. Cunningham abstaining.

5. Mr. Haddad said that they had received an anticipated budget from Middlesex County Retirement that included a 12% increase this year which was much higher than what they had thought.

Mr. Cunningham asked about the letter they received from Middlesex County Retirement. Mr. Petropoulos said that the Board asked for Middlesex County Retirement to extend the years left on the unfunded pensions but they responded that they were no prepared to extend the years at this point. Mr. Haddad said that they were being penalized for things within Middlesex County Retirement and the reason for the higher assessment. He said that the penalties were because of a couple of reclassifications for GELD employees that were in group 4 not group 1 and the cost to be in group 4 was much higher. . He said that the high increase along with the 12% they were budgeting for health insurance was putting his budget out of 2.4% guidance. He said that all other department budgets had come in lower than the 2.4%. Mr. Haddad said that because of 12.5% increase in benefits, this put the proposed budget increase at 2.78%. He said that GELD would be picking up a portion of that based on their payroll but it still meant he wouldn't be able to meet the 2.4% guideline and wanted to make sure that the Board was aware of this. Mr. Green said he thought it was important to hear that everyone was okay with this not just that it was understood. Mr. Prest asked about the school budget. Mr. Haddad said that he was anticipating \$1.2M of revenue for the next year. He said that preliminarily he was able to give the schools \$680K without cutting any municipal services. Mr. Haddad said that he was told the schools carry over costs were over \$1M adding that 77% of that was their share.

Mr. Pease said he thought they needed to be hashing out these difficult decisions now. Mr. Petropoulos said that they were two different independent bodies. Mr. Cunningham said that the hard conversations would be going on during budget presentations. Mr. Pease argued that if you know things, you start planning early. Mr. Petropoulos said he didn't see them going down the same tracks as last year. He said that they had been talking about 2.4% for some time adding it was baseline to work off of. Mr. Pease agreed adding that if people didn't buy into it you would have conflict. He said he couldn't sit there and say they were doing all they could. Ms. Eliot asked if they should have a meeting with the School Committee. Mr. Degen said he had been asking for one for months. Mr. Cunningham said that they were not going to get any answers this early in the process. Mr. Haddad said that the schools were facing two major issues; they had one superintendent starting and another one finish and they were coming up on collective bargaining. Mr. Haddad said that Mr. Green had made a presentation about the numbers. Mr. Green said he felt as though

the message was clear and that they understood. Mr. Degen said he was astounded at requests made by the Town Manager and himself to say exactly what Mr. Pease was saying. He said that they needed to send a letter to the schools to either come to one of their meeting or for the Board to go to one of theirs.

Mr. Degen moved to direct the Town Manager to send a letter to the Superintendent and School Committee to have an immediate meeting before the end of the calendar year where they will fully attend at either their meeting or the Boards. Mr. Pease seconded the motion. Ms. Eliot asked that the interim Superintendent attend also. Mr. Degen said he would add that to his motion. Mr. Pease seconded the amendment.

Mr. Petropoulos said he was sensitive to the idea that independent elected boards have their own procedures. He said that they had gone to great lengths to make sure the School Committee knew about 2.4%. Mr. Degen said he was still asking for a meeting. Mr. Pease said that based on the guidance the School Committee gave the Superintendent, he wasn't sure the 2.4% was understood. Mr. Petropoulos said that Alison Manugian was on their Sustainable Budget Committee and didn't think they could tell her anything more.

Mr. Degen withdrew his motion.

Mr. Haddad said that he was meeting with the Superintendent this Wednesday adding he was going to lay things out and show her what the Town could afford. Mr. Green asked if it would make sense to have Chair of the School Committee and Budget and Finance Subcommittee there. Mr. Degen said that sounded good to him.

LIAISON REPORTS

Ms. Eliot said that Indian Hill was on the Planning Board agenda that coming Thursday.

Mr. Cunningham said that he attended an Eagle Scout Court of Honor for a nice young man whose project was the remove tires off the Nate Nutting Property. He said it never ceased to amaze him how many eagle scouts there were and how their projects benefited the Town and instilled good things.

Mr. Petropoulos said that GELD had received and reviewed the single RFP proposal they received adding they hadn't made a final decision yet.

Mr. Petropoulos said that he had met with the interim superintendent who was eager to learn. He said that he also had grandchildren in the district and had worked in Acton-Boxboro adding he had regional school district experience.

Mr. Degen said that the Regional Agreement Committee unanimously recommended to the School Committee the new agreement that had been vetted by DESE for accuracy and consistency. He said that they voted not to add language to allow for a third-party entity or anyone to rent to the school district. Mr. Pease said that they had sound reasons why they didn't want it inserted. He said that Mr. Degen and himself would have been the only ones to vote in favor of it anyway.

MINUTES

Ms. Eliot moved to approve the Regular Session meeting minutes of November 14, 2016. Mr. Pease seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Petropoulos adjourned the meeting at 9:18pm.

Approved: _____
Barry Pease, Clerk

_____ respectfully submitted,
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: 12/19/16