

TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of Meeting Held 1-19-2010

Present: J. Prager (Chair), R. Hughson, M. Flynn, P. diFranco, J Cochran, J. Crowley, V. Jenkins (Accountant, Recording Secretary)

Guests: M. Haddad (Town Manager), F. Dillon, P. Cunningham, A. Elliot (all from Board of Selectmen)

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 PM. Approval of the minutes from December 29, 2009 and January 4, 2010 were deferred.

Mr. Haddad reported on the status of the Groton-Dunstable School District budget. The Superintendent is assuming a 2.5% increase from Groton and a similar amount from Dunstable, although the Dunstable number has not been confirmed. The deficit for the District is large enough that the Superintendent may ask school and town officials to consider an override. There is a meeting scheduled on January 20th to further discuss this in order to be ready for a school budget meeting on January 26th.

Mr. Prager summarized his meeting with Robert Whalen, General Manager of the Country Club. Although several changes have resulted in better control of expenses and there is a plan in the works to project future years' operational needs, there is no current guarantee that the full lease payment of \$70,000 will be forthcoming in June. The next meeting of the ad hoc committee to review the future of the Club will be on January 29th at 10 AM. In order for the Club to continue, it appears that significant infusions of cash will be needed. Mr. Prager believes that it is important that the Town understands clearly the magnitude of the financial need and who will provide such a capital investment.

Mr. Prager asked for a report on the Master Plan funding. Mr. Haddad noted that the Planning Board had re-visited the Master Plan components with the result that the Planning Board itself will do more to contribute to the work necessary to complete the Master Plan, but that the first year's cost will not change. The Conservation Commission has combined its need for an updated open space and recreation plan with the Master Plan at a cost of \$9000, which will go to the same consultants who are providing the Master Plan. This does not result in a decrease of the cost of the Master Plan. The ConsComm Plan was originally estimated at approximately \$29,000, which led the FinCom to question why the entire \$29K wasn't deducted from the Master Plan cost, given that the MP also included an "open space" component. There is no current answer to this. Ms. Elliot offered that the two "open space" plans (Master Plan version and ConsComm version) are actually "different", with specific requirement to each.

Mr. Haddad asked how the FinCom will review the department budgets for FY 2011. The FinCom will be approaching their assigned departments over the next few weeks with a list of outstanding issues to be discussed. There is a plan to have the list of issues available in draft form by the next FinCom meeting on February 2nd. High on the list of issues will be the need for new staff or increased hours. The FinCom plans to have at least one meeting with the Selectmen prior to a day-long budget meeting on February 27th. Mr. Prager reminded the group that the budget deliberations have to take a longer financial view than just FY 2011.

A meeting with the Library Trustees that included Mr. Prager, Mr. Haddad and Mr. Dillon convened to discuss the Library budget and options for raising revenue revealed that the Trustees understand the

economic conditions but feel unfairly pressured because it is known that the Library has other sources of funding (endowment, trusts). Mr. Haddad confirmed for them that other sources of funding are a consideration when balancing the tax-based budget line items. The Trustees also feel that they cannot, by law, raise revenue on their own, such as charging for library cards. It was noted that, even if there is a law to this effect, it may apply only to obtaining state funding, which is less than \$15,000 per year. It may be more practical to by-pass the aid and raise revenue.

Mr. diFranco has been researching expense trends in the Police Department with the help of the Town Accountant. He reported briefly to the FinCom that expense drivers appear to be new vehicle acquisition, vehicle repair costs, and building fuel/electricity as well as a large number of vendors for the same type of service (uniforms, office supplies), which may lead to lowered ability to track costs and obtain savings. He will continue to evaluate. The Accountant continues to summarize costs in all departments and hopes to have more information by the next meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM. The next meeting is scheduled for February 2nd.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Jenkins
Recording Secretary