

TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

Minutes of Meeting Held January 26th 2013

GDRSD Middle School Cafeteria, Groton, MA 8:15 a.m.

Present: R. Hargraves, M. Flynn, S. Webber, P. DiFranco, G. Green, J. Crowley, J. Prager (Chair), P. DuFresne (Town Accountant, Recording),

Absent: None,

Guests: Mark Haddad (Town Manager), Bruce Easom (CPC Representative)

Documents available at the meeting: FY2013 CPC Budget Projections
Special Town Meeting Warrant/Motions

Discussion of Herbicide Treatment for Lost Lake - Mr. Prager asked the committee members if they were still satisfied with the position they had previously taken regarding Article 1. The members confirmed that they were still unanimously in support of Article 1 (Herbicide Treatment for Lost Lake) as written.

Discussion of Fitch's Bridge Funding – The Finance Committee members reviewed the updated accounting of the CPC budget projections for FY13. Mr. Prager suggested that the Town Meeting vote on this project should be deferred until the Spring Town Meeting. It should be considered in light of the FY2014 Town Operating Budget. He noted that the original assumptions regarding this project which at one time made it appropriate for presentation at the Special Town Meeting were now no longer valid. As the bids came in much lower than the original estimates, there is no need to bond the bridge repair with the Center Fire Station project; therefore there is no need to rush it to Town Meeting on an out-of-cycle CPC application. It should compete on a “level playing field” with any other CPC funding requests that may be submitted during the normal application cycle. Mr. DiFranco noted that the CPC had the opportunity to disallow the last minute Fitch's Bridge application, but they chose to support it. Mr. Webber agreed with Mr. Prager saying that financial articles should not be voted at a Special Town Meeting, unless like the Center Fire Station, there are extraordinary timing issues that deem it appropriate. He would feel more comfortable voting to support the bridge once the school district's needs were known. Mr. Prager wondered whether the Town wouldn't gain an advantage from requesting a new set of bids. Perhaps some savings could be realized from requiring three separate price quotes: demolition only, replacement only and demolition plus replacement. He explained that Town Counsel believes the Department of Transportation has no jurisdiction over this project; this will also work to keep costs down.

On a motion by Mr. Prager, seconded by Mr. Hargraves, the Finance Committee voted to recommend indefinitely postponing Article 2 (Fitch's Bridge Funding). The Vote: 6-1-0

On a motion by Mr. Prager, seconded by Mr. Green, the Finance Committee voted to reconsider the position they had previously taken (Jan. 15, 2013) on Article 2 (Fitch's Bridge Funding).

Mr. Green stated that he could support the demolition and replacement of the bridge as the Article was now written, however, he would prefer that it be voted in the spring. Mr. Webber and Mr. Prager agreed saying that they could support the project sometime in the future, as long as there were no other significant budgetary issues to take priority. Mr. Flynn felt that replacing the bridge was a frivolous expenditure.

Regarding the motion already on the floor, the Finance Committee voted in favor of reconsidering the position they had previously taken on Article 2 (Fitch's Bridge Funding). The Vote: 7-0-0

Mr. Green moved that the Finance Committee support Article 2 (Fitch's Bridge Funding) as currently written: \$193,782 to be spent from CPC Unallocated Reserves, \$31,627 from CPC Historic Reserve, and \$160,000 from the Stabilization Fund. This motion, seconded by Mr. DiFranco, failed. The Vote: 2-5-0

Discussion of Center Fire Station Debt Exclusion – Mr. Prager noted that the Finance Committee's previous position on this issue was mixed (the previous vote to support was 3-1-2). He stated that he still believes that a project of this magnitude should be voted at the ballot box, preferably before a great deal of time and money are wasted on obtaining project cost estimates. At this point, however, he is concerned that further delay of the project in order to get an advisory opinion from a ballot vote may not be practical. Town Counsel believes that the only way to get this project voted by ballot is through requesting a debt exclusion. Any other format would result in usurpation of Town Meeting authority as the appropriating body. Mr. Prager felt it was too late now to consider any other amendments to the existing motion, for instance excluding a portion of the debt. He added that perhaps a change in the Town Charter should be considered, although that could not be done without involvement of the State Legislature, which would take time. Mr. Green and Mr. DiFranco felt that excluding the debt is simply a formula for raising taxes. Mr. Hargraves reminded the group that the reason for the amendment was to force a ballot vote in order to get a true reading of public sentiment, not necessarily to exclude the debt. Mr. Prager felt that he may not be entirely in support of the amendment at this point.

Mr. Prager moved that the Finance Committee reconsider their previously taken position of support for a potential amendment to exclude the Center Fire Station debt. Mr. Green seconded this motion. The motion to reconsider failed. The Vote: 3-4-0

Approval of Meeting Minutes - On a motion by Mr. Webber, seconded by Mr. Prager, the Finance Committee voted to approve the minutes from their meeting of January 15, 2013 as drafted. The Vote: 6-0-1 (Mr. Crowley abstained as he was absent from that meeting).

At this point (8:50 a.m.), the Finance Committee joined the Special Town Meeting in the Middle School Performing Arts Center. Special Town Meeting adjourned at 12:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Dufresne, Recording Secretary