

# TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

---

**Minutes of Regular Meeting Held September 26, 2013**

**75 Hollis St, Legion Hall, 7:00 p.m.**

**Present for Finance Committee:** R. Hargraves, S. Webber, D. Manugian (non-voting) G. Green, J. Prager (Chair), P. DuFresne (Town Accountant, Recording)

**Absent:** P. DiFranco, Joe Crowley

**Guests:** Members of the Park Commission (Gineane Haberlin, Rob Flynn, Laurie Smigelski), Fire Protection Committee Member (Tom Orcutt), Board of Selectmen member (Jack Petropoulos)

**Documents available at the meeting:** Lost Lake Fire Protection Maps  
Parks Commission Project Highlights: FinCom Presentation

*Mr. Prager called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.*

**Summary of Discussion of Park Commission Property Improvements:** Mr. Flynn explained to the group that the Park Commission has undergone a significant reorganization in terms of members. He feels that certain oversights have been allowed to perpetuate with regard to some very important and visible Town resources. The projects highlighted in the presentation represent the most egregious problems which the Commission would like to correct as soon as possible. Many of these can be undertaken during the winter or even sooner (tree work, Town Field shed roofing, Library Field Gazebo damage). The members of the Park Commission summarized their most pressing needs as follows:

- The flagpole in Fireman's Common is rusted out. Because it is currently too tall and is also covered in lead paint, it should be replaced rather than repaired.
- The replacement railings in front of Minuteman Common have been purchased but have yet to be installed.
- The Town Field behind the library needs some attention to correct dry rot of the gazebo structure and drainage and surface repair for the basketball court.
- Cutler Field requires tree trimming and field work to support its planned use for soccer and lacrosse. The Ledge Rock Field project, if it is finally approved, will not be available for use for several years. In the meantime, the private schools allow only limited access to their own fields for town-wide use.
- Hazel Grove is a very rare and unusual resource that has been maintained as best possible by the user groups (most notably the Groton Pony Club, and the Groton Riding & Driving Club); however, some contribution from the town is now necessary. The Park Commission is committed to making these 28 acres a key part of the fabric of Groton. The Hazel Grove Agricultural Association has

set up membership fees, the goal being to re-invest this money and make the facility self-sustaining.

The group discussed the role that the DPW should play in supporting Park Commission needs. It was noted that while DPW can provide limited field mowing services, it is generally unable to spare staff for Park projects unless those needs are separately itemized in the DPW budget.

Mr. Hargraves stressed that it would be important for the Park Commission to communicate to the residents exactly how each user group contributes to field and facility maintenance. If it is perceived that the town is subsidizing a particular group unfairly, requests for funding will likely be rejected at Town Meeting.

Mr. Webber noted that a clear budget for Parks is not consistently submitted. He would like to see that budget re-worked and clarified for FY2015. Mr. Prager agreed saying that a realistic baseline budget that includes a long-term capital plan will be essential going forward. Mr. Flynn replied that now that the Commission has an understanding of its responsibilities and jurisdiction, consistent budgeting and project management will be provided as a matter of course. Ms. Haberlin added that the Parks Commission will seek CPC funding in future as well.

**On a motion by Mr. Green, seconded by Mr. Webber, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to support Article 7: Improvements to Town Properties (\$50,000) for Fall Town Meeting. The Vote: 4-0-0.**

**Summary of Discussion of Lost Lake Fire Protection Design Funding Request:** Mr. Orcutt drew the group's attention to the maps he had prepared showing current water system specifications and current and proposed hydrants. Map #2 specifically identifies the fire protection coverage area for each system hydrant. He explained that the area right around Lost Lake is the most densely populated, but also has unusually narrow streets, making firefighting challenging. Mr. Prager would like to be sure that the most densely populated neighborhood in town is indeed at Lost Lake. The group briefly discussed the challenges of firefighting and providing water to other sections of Town (Dunstable Rd, Reedy Meadow, Longley Rd, Chicopee Rd). He noted that it would be prohibitively expensive to provide water to the north section of town.

Mr. Webber asked for an estimate of the cost per linear foot of extending a water main. Mr. Orcutt said that it would cost between \$120 and \$130 per linear foot to install 12-inch pipe. If the extension will involve paving, the cost would go up to approximately \$150 per linear ft.

Mr. Prager wondered if there is land available in Lost Lake to bury cisterns, as this seems to be a more cost effective solution than extending water mains. Mr. Orcutt replied that the Groton Conservation Trust might provide some land on the peninsula. The dimensions of a cistern are 8 x 10 x 100 ft, and would hold 50,000 gallons of water or 1 hour's worth of fire fighting protection. The group discussed the possibility of burying cisterns in the lake. Mr. Orcutt felt that this would probably be an expensive solution, and the cisterns would have to be buried deep enough to prevent freezing and to avoid impeding boat traffic. Mr. Prager led a discussion regarding the provision of drinking water to Lost Lake. Mr. Orcutt explained that the idea behind extending the water main was to provide pressure and flow for fire protection purposes. Individual water service lines were not envisioned in an effort to keep the

costs down. However, if a particular resident wanted to pay for the stub and connect to the drinking water delivery system, they could do so. Mr. Prager said that a pertinent question remains about how to recoup the taxpayer investment in this project after new customers connect to that municipal water system. Mr. Orcutt cautioned that charging betterments would be difficult as not every household that receives fire protection services from the new water main will actually be "bettered." Betterments cannot be assessed for fire protection, only for drinking water or sewer services. Mr. Manugian asked how the construction phase of this project would be funded; would the debt be undertaken through general taxation or paid by the Enterprise Fund. Mr. Orcutt replied that while the particulars of the funding plan have yet to be decided, it would be difficult for the Water Enterprise to take on any additional debt. Mr. Petropoulos asked whether the water system had the capacity to provide drinking water to a new neighborhood. Mr. Orcutt replied that the current system could only accept about fifty (50) new homes as it is pretty much operating at capacity. To add any significant number of new customers, the Water Department would have to petition DEP for an increase in its water withdrawal permit, and also consider developing the Unkety Brook and Shattuck wells. The Water Department will not consider developing a new well without a significant increase in both its water withdrawal permit and customer demand.

The group briefly discussed the issue of raising rates on secondary (irrigation) meters. Mr. Orcutt agreed that at some future point, this strategy could be used to increase revenue for the Water Enterprise.

Mr. Prager wondered why the Fire Protection Committee chose to format this project into three (3) separate warrant articles. Mr. Orcutt explained that while a single engineer was going to provide the design services, the topography of the area called for three (3) distinct solutions to the problem. Mr. Prager said he would rather see this considered as a single project at Town Meeting and therefore, it should be integrated into a single warrant article.

In response to a question from Mr. Webber, Mr. Orcutt summarized the impact of each proposed solution:

Pine Trail Water Main Extension: (2700 ft)	* 40 houses will gain fire protection services * 20 houses will gain ability to connect for drinking water
Groton Ridge Extension (1600 ft)	* 77 houses will gain fire protection services * 30 houses will gain ability to connect for drinking water
Weymisset Cistern	* 26 houses will gain fire protection services
Prescott Cistern	* 14 houses will gain fire protection services

Mr. Green would like to see a map created that shows the proposed improvements, perhaps through an overlay sheet. Mr. Webber noted that at the estimated cost of \$50,000, installing a cistern might be something that a neighborhood group could undertake on its own.

Mr. Orcutt informed the Finance Committee that he plans to have construction bids available in time for the Spring Town Meeting, provided that the design funding is approved at the upcoming Fall Town Meeting. Wright-Pierce is the engineering firm that will be completing the design work.

**Summary of Discussion Regarding the Use of Free Cash to Offset the Tax Rate:** Ms. Dufresne informed the Finance Committee that the Board of Selectmen is considering committing \$100,000 of FY13 Free Cash to offset the tax rate. The committee members discussed the amount of Free Cash estimated to be available, and the balance likely to be remaining after all the Town Meeting warrant articles are voted in October. Ms. Dufresne confirmed that the Finance Team prefers to hold aside a balance of at least \$250,000 against unforeseen events that might take place as the year progresses. The Finance Committee members discussed the notion that Free Cash tends to get spent on miscellany if it is not used to offset the tax rate.

**Mr. Hargraves moved to recommend that \$150,000 be set aside from Free Cash to offset the tax rate (Article 5 of the Fall Town Meeting warrant). Mr. Webber seconded this motion. After additional discussion, Mr. Webber suggested an amendment to the motion stipulating that the Finance Committee would support committing \$150,000 of Free Cash to offset the tax rate only if the final FY13 Free Cash is certified by DOR at \$1,316,409 or greater. Mr. Green moved to amend the original motion as suggested, and Mr. Webber seconded. The vote to amend carried unanimously. The Vote: 4-0-0. The vote on the original motion as amended carried unanimously. The Vote: 4-0-0.**

**Approval of Meeting Minutes –**

The Finance Committee deferred approval of meeting minutes from 9/16/13 until their next meeting scheduled for 10/21/2013.

Mr. Prager officially adjourned the meeting at 9:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Dufresne, Recording Secretary