

# TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

---

## Minutes of Regular Meeting Held April, 1st, 2014

173 Main St., Town Hall, 7:00 p.m.

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

**Absent:** Joe Crowley

**Guests:** Jon Strauss and Gineane Haberlin (Both Representing the Parks Commission), Anna Eliot (Selectwoman)

**Documents available at the meeting:** FY2015 Proposed Town Budget – Draft of 3/24/14  
2014 Spring Town Meeting Warrant – DRAFT of 3/24/14  
Reserve Fund Transfer Request for Elections Expense

*Mr. Prager called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.*

**Update on Ledge Rock Field CPC Project** – Mr. Strauss explained that the Parks Commission had applied for \$41,000 from CPA funds for the Ledge Rock Project to augment the \$309,000 already received in FY14. He summarized the Project’s funding strategy as follows:

\$350,000	CPC Funding
\$ 50,000	User Group Funding
\$400,000	State Reimbursement (PARC Grant)
<u>\$100,000</u>	Town of Groton Funding
\$900,000	Total Project Costs

Mr. Strauss cautioned that the Town would be required to seek short-term bonding up front in the amount of \$500,000, which would be partially offset by the State reimbursement. Mr. Prager was concerned that given the regional school district budget crisis, the Town may no longer be able to afford to bond this project. Mr. Strauss replied that he feels this is an excellent opportunity for the Town, and that he has recently spoken to the Town Manager who assured him that this was still a viable project. Mr. Hargraves asked whether the State would reimburse the interest paid on the short-term note. Mr. Strauss said that the interest expense was not eligible for grant reimbursement. Mr. Green asked whether the user groups could be asked to increase the amount of their proposed contribution. Ms. Haberlin said that the terms of the grant limit the amount that user groups can pay; it must be essentially a Town-funded project. The Finance Committee asked for an update on general playing field usage. Mr. Strauss replied that usage is incredibly dense. Even given the fact of fewer school-aged children in Town, more children are playing multiple sports each season. This makes scheduling very difficult, and allows for no time to “rest” the fields between seasons. The group briefly discussed other properties that could be developed for playing

fields. Mr. Strauss said that all the research indicates that the Ledge Rock site is the most affordable, and would require the least amount of site preparation. Mr. Prager would like a chance to get confirmation from the Town Manager that the Town was still in a position to bond \$500,000 for this purpose. He also would like to see some objective evidence of field utilization. He argued that perhaps the Town is providing sufficient playing fields, and that it would be appropriate to say “no” to new demands at some point. Mr. Prager asked whether the State grant terms allowed the Town to phase the construction over several years. Mr. Strauss replied that the grant does not limit the Town to a firm completion date. Mr. Webber wondered whether providing lights for some of the fields would allow for extended scheduling. Mr. Strauss agreed that lighting the fields would extend use of the fields to a degree, but only about 15%, and would only benefit practice times, not game times. Mr. Manugian reminded the group that Town Meeting has in fact supported this project as currently envisioned, and that the level of State reimbursement expected is substantial. Mr. Strauss said that he plans to have a Level 2 site plan review done before any additional investment is made in the project. If this review determines that the site would not support the project for any reason, the funds will be returned to CPC and no further work will be done. On the other hand, if the site plan review is finished and returns a positive result, the project can be considered “shovel-ready” which will garner additional points during the State grant application process. Mr. Strauss explained that the previous PARC grant application was well received, although in the end it failed to win enough points. He plans to resubmit the grant application (with some improvements) during the coming year. Mr. Prager agreed that a site plan review is a necessary next step in this process, and he has no fundamental objection to the construction of the playing fields.

The group discussed the conflict inherent in having two competing CPC applications for Conservation Commission interests. The Conservation Commission is currently seeking funds to build the balance in its Land Acquisition account. At the same time, the Sargisson Beach Committee is requesting CPC support for restoration work at the beach. This was generally felt to be problematic. A question was raised as to whether CPC funding recommendations could be amended on the floor of Town Meeting. Ms. Haberlin replied that individual recommendations could be amended to approve a lesser amount of money, but could not be approved for more than what the CPC had endorsed. Mr. Strauss felt that with the large percentage of Town land already under Conservation Restrictions, the focus should shift to improving infrastructure. He reminded the group that Conservation interests are actually receiving almost \$500,000 per year (the amount of the annual debt service on the Surrenden Farms land). Mr. Prager wondered whether the Sargisson Beach restoration could be postponed for a year. Ms. Haberlin replied that the erosion situation was critical and should be addressed immediately.

*Mr. Strauss and Ms. Haberlin left the meeting at this time (7:35 p.m.)*

**Reserve Fund Transfer Request** – Ms. Dufresne explained that a Reserve Fund Transfer request in the amount of \$5,500.00 had been submitted by Mr. Bouchard for support of the elections expense line item for FY14. This represents the estimated costs associated with moving the polling place for Precincts 2 & 3 from the Prescott School to the Groton Country Club. These expenses relate to minor repairs and ADA modifications needed for the Function Hall building itself, but also include signage and all necessary mailings. These repairs are expected to be completed in time for the May town election. Mr. Prager wondered why an expense estimate was included for Legion Hall signage. It was determined later in the meeting that this cost was added at the request of the Land Use Director and while necessary, was not technically related to the polling place relocation effort.

**On a motion by Mr. Hargraves, seconded by Mr. Robertson, the Finance Committee voted in the majority to approve a Reserve Fund Transfer in the amount of \$5,500 to the FY14 Elections Expense budget line. The Vote: 5-1-0**

**Warrant Review for FinCom Positions** – The Finance Committee briefly addressed each Warrant Article and voted their positions for Town Meeting. The attached Finance Committee Town Meeting Positions document reflects each individual vote. Discussion highlights are as follows:

- **Article 2 – Elected Officials Compensation:** Several members felt that it was inappropriate for the Town Clerk to be receiving a salary increase. As an elected official, that salary should not necessarily mirror those of the appointed Department Heads. Mr. Green suggested that the Town Clerk should be made an appointed position.
- **Article 3 – Wage & Classification Schedule:** Mr. Prager noted that offering an extra 2% salary adjustment to the Bylaw employees simply to maintain parity with unionized Department Heads is a prime example of how the Town has allowed its salaries to run out of control.
- **Article 5 – FY15 Town Operating Budget:** Mr. Webber felt that the Police & Fire budgets were inflated. Mr. Manugian agreed saying that his own review of the police budget suggests that sick leave is abused. He suggested allowing Chief Palma a year to address this issue. The group noted that hiring additional officers adds to the “culture of abuse” of sick time, and does not tend to alleviate overtime. Mr. Webber thought that budget performance may be improved if personnel are reduced. Mr. Robertson said that this would be a useful discussion to have if the April 1<sup>st</sup> Debt Exclusion vote fails. Mr. Hargraves suggested implementing a sick time buy-back incentive program.
- **Article 6 – FY15 Capital Budget:** Mr. Prager felt that the Forestry Unit conversion could be deferred for at least a year. This level of protection is simply unnecessary especially since surrounding communities are responsive to mutual aid requests. Mr. Hargraves suggested that this expense could be postponed long enough to allow the new Fire Chief to make the decision. Mr. Green asked what the Town would do with the old ambulance in the meantime. Mr. Prager agreed that it makes sense to do something with this asset sooner rather than later. The Finance Committee deferred taking a position on the Building Security expenditure (\$30,000) until additional information is received regarding this three-year phased plan. The Finance Committee voted to support the purchase of three new police cruisers for FY15, but would like to see a more detailed analysis of life expectancy, average mileage and maintenance costs.
- **Article 18 – CPC Project Recommendations:** The Finance Committee members discussed the proposal to improve Sargisson Beach. Mr. Green would like to see an analysis of how the \$109,500 proposed funding would be spent. He feels he could support the request, although he is not convinced that there is any urgency to do it immediately. Mr. Prager noted that the relatively high cost of the Surrenden Farms debt service means that the small reserve balance leftover is more or less wasted on non-critical projects. He would like to see the CPC hold off on making any recommendations for a year or two in order to allow all the reserve balances to grow. More worthwhile projects could be undertaken this way. The members were generally concerned that the Conservation Commission had submitted CPC applications for competing interests. Mr. Prager felt that the Sargisson Beach funding should take priority over adding to the Conservation Commission’s Land Acquisition Fund.

- Article 21 – Sale or Lease of Prescott School: The Finance Committee discussed aspects of the current bid to develop the property (bid price \$35,000). Mr. Robertson would prefer that a Finance Committee member be invited to sit on any future committees involved with the disposition of Town properties. Mr. Hargraves said such committees should also include several non-Town employees. Mr. Prager was concerned that the Finance Committee was not involved in this sooner; it is now too late to have an impact on the decision-making process. He added that as long as the BOS remains firmly in charge, the committee as appointed seems to be appropriate.

**Approval of Meeting Minutes –**

**On a motion by Mr. Green, seconded by Mr. Manugian, the Finance Committee voted in the majority to approve the regular meeting minutes of March 11, 2014. The Vote: 4-0-2**

**On a motion by Mr. Green, seconded by Mr. Manugian, The Finance Committee voted in the majority to approve the regular meeting minutes of March 24, 2014. The Vote: 5-0-1**

Next Scheduled Meeting: The Finance Committee agreed to meet on 4/28/14 at 6:30 p.m. (prior to Town Meeting) in the cafeteria of the Groton Dunstable Regional Middle School in order to take positions on any warrant articles that were previously deferred, or to address new business.

Mr. Prager officially adjourned the meeting at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Dufresne, Recording Secretary

Spring Town Meeting 04/28/2014

Finance Committee Positions on Articles (votes taken 04/01/2014 & 4/28/14)

Article #	Description	Dollar Amount	Moved	Second	Jay P	Joe C	Dave M	Steve W	Bob H	Bud R	Gary G	Total Vote	Presenter
2	Elected Officials' Compensation	\$ 78,094.00	GG	SW	N		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5-1-0	
3	Wage & Classification Schedule	4% incr. AMENDED	GG	BR	N		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5-1-0	
4	Rescind Mosquito Control Vote	\$ 73,000.00	BH	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
5	FY15 Annual Operating Budget	\$ 32,048,878.00	SW	BR	Y		Y	N	Y	Y	Y	5-1-0	
6	FY15 Capital Budget	\$ 635,190.00										<b>VOTED INDIVIDUALLY BELOW</b>	
6.1	EMS Ambulance (EMS Rcpts)	\$ 280,000.00	GG	BR	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
6.2	Forestry Unit Conversion	\$ 50,000.00	GG	BH	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
6.3	Pick-Up Truck Hwy	\$ 35,000.00	BH	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
6.4	IT Infrastructure	\$ 40,000.00	BH	GG	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
6.5	Town Bldg Security Upgrade	\$ 30,000.00	SW	DM			Y	Y	Y		Y	5-0-0	voted 4/28
6.6	Roof Top HVAC for Library	\$ 43,690.00	BH	BR	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
6.7	Police Cruisers (3)	\$ 120,000.00	BH	BR	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
6.8	Rough Mower (GPGC)	\$ 10,000.00	GG	SW	N		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5-1-0	
6.9	Golf Carts (GPGC)	\$ 20,000.00	BH	SW	N		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5-1-0	
6.10	Boom Sprayer (GPGC)	\$ 6,500.00	BR	DM	N		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5-1-0	
7	<b>FY2014 Line Item Transfers</b>	\$ 255,350.00	DM	BR	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
8	Water Enterprise Trf f/ E&D	\$ 100,000.00	BH	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
9	Sewer Enterprise Trf f/ E&D	\$ 100,000.00	BH	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
10	Prior Year Bills	\$ -	BH	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
11	Free Cash for PP Revaluation	\$ 10,000.00	DM	BR	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
12	Rcpts Rsv Trf to Tipping Fees	\$ 25,439.00	GG	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
13	Free Cash for 911 Deficits	\$ 8,678.30	GG	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
14	Approp Surety Paymt Fire Sta	\$ 248,000.00	SW	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
15	Library Auto. Doors (Free Cash)	\$ 9,000.00	GG	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
16	NVTHSD Roof Repair Bond Auth		BH	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
17	CPC Funding Accounts	\$ 676,500.00	BH	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
18	CPC Project Recommendations											<b>VOTED INDIVIDUALLY BELOW</b>	
18A	Ledge Rock Field	\$ 41,000.00	BH	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
18B	Baddacock Pond Herbicide	NOT RECOMMENDED BY CPC											
18C	Mile Stone Restoration	\$ 23,000.00	BH	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	

Spring Town Meeting 04/28/2014

Finance Committee Positions on Articles (votes taken 04/01/2014 & 4/28/14)

Article #	Description	Dollar Amount	Moved	Second	Jay P	Joe C	Dave M	Steve W	Bob H	Bud R	Gary G	Total Vote	Presenter
18D	Conservation Fund Transfer	\$ 100,000.00	GG	BH	N		N	N	N	N	N	0-6-0	
18E	Sargisson Beach Restoration	\$ 109,590.00	BH	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
18F	GPGC Driving Range	\$ 47,000.00	BH	DM	N		Abstain	Y	Y	Y	N	3-2-1	
18G	Housing Coord Inc. Hours	\$ 47,618.00	GG	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
21	Sale or Lease of Prescott School		SW	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
22	TIF Agreement for Prescott Sch.		SW	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
23	Sale or Lease of Ctr Fire Station		BH	DM	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
26	Squannacook Septic Rep. (F.C.)	\$ 30,000.00	BH	BR	Y		Abstain	Y	Y	Y	Y	5-0-1	
27	Sale/Lease of Squannacook Hall		BH	BR	Y		Abstain	Y	Y	Y	Y	5-0-1	
30	Apply for Grants		GG	BH	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
31	Surrenden Farms Debt Service	\$ 486,475.00	GG	BH	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
32	Stormwater Mgmt Revolv Fund	\$ 10,000.00	GG	BH	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
33	ConsComm Revolving Fund	\$ 50,000.00	GG	BH	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
34	Affordable Housing Revolv Fund	\$ 50,000.00	GG	BH	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
35	Increase RE Tax Exemption	\$ 1,000.00	GG	BH	Y		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6-0-0	
	Total	\$ 34,226,819.30											
	Total Free Cash committed	\$ 57,678.30											
	FY14 Free Cash Bal. Remaining	\$ 287,770											

Y= Voted to Support  
 N=Voted Against Support