TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, September 1st, 2015, 1st Floor Meeting Rm
Groton Town Hall, 173 Main St. Groton, MA, 7:00 p.m.

Present for Finance Committee: R. Hargraves (Vice Chair), G. Green (Chair), B. Robertson, B. Pease, Art Prest, M. Bacon, D. Manugian, P. DuFresne (Town Accountant, Recording)

Absent: None

Also Present: Scott Harker, Marlena Gilbert, John Giger, Michael McCoy (via phone), Josh Degen (BOS member)

Documents available at the meeting: CRC Candidate Resumes/Letters of Interest
FinCom Charter Review Goal Documents (Drafts)
4th Qtr. FY15 Town of Groton Budget Summary

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

CRC Candidate Interviews – Ms. Gilbert introduced herself as a small business owner with experience in business planning, market analysis, organization and management. She is relatively new to Groton, but stressed her ability to think creatively and would like an opportunity to play a part in helping shape the constitution of the Town. She explained that the charter document is crucial as it sets the platform for how the Town will be governed and should also reveal the residents’ aspirations. She is active in the community and is a boy scout Den Leader, a member of APEX and the Vice Chair of PECC. Mr. Hargraves asked whether she believes in a centralized or a decentralized government. Ms. Gilbert replied that in her opinion 90% of local officials should be elected. Community residents should play a larger role in the running of the Town; staying informed leads to greater engagement. Mr. Robertson asked for her opinion on the current condition of the Town Charter. Ms. Gilbert said that minor changes are necessary as communication methods and processes have changed over the last 10 years. She would like the Charter to include more oversight and direction for officials in positions of power. She mentioned that the threshold of obtaining 10 signatures in order to place a petition on the Town Meeting warrant seems too low. She feels that the Town Manager form of government is a good one; this ensures that an individual specifically qualified to run the day to day operations of the Town reports to the BOS. The current Charter lacks direction and specificity, for instance, the school committee’s functions are included but there is no language that identifies how its power is held. Mr. Pease asked Ms. Gilbert to opine on the Charter document’s effectiveness versus its efficiency. Ms. Gilbert replied that while the processes supported by the Charter seem efficient, they could be more effective. There is little language to support budget formatting and goals. No one reading our current Charter could determine what our Town is all about and how we feel about it; this should be a major part of any constitution. Mr. Harker asked whether she can be an objective team member. She replied that she has made no secret of the fact that she is very
interested and concerned about the state of the school district. She feels confident that this will not interfere with her ability to participate objectively on the committee, however she admitted that public perception may be otherwise. *Ms. Gilbert left the meeting at 7:25 p.m.*

Mr. Giger introduced himself as a retired high-tech professional who had devoted his professional life to both the private sector and the US Navy. He has participated for many years on a variety of boards and committees in Groton, including the Planning Board and the School Committee. He explained that he had not put his name forward during the initial round of interviews because he likes to give other residents a chance to become involved. Mr. Hargraves asked whether he prefers a centralized or more decentralized government. Mr. Giger replied that given the size of Groton, some centralization is necessary. While the Charter in its current format is functioning within standard baselines, now that we have had a chance to work with it for several years, there is some room for clarification and fine-tuning. He recommends creating a model of what needs to be done, identifying the resources and then finding a balance. He informed the group that he created the model for the Town’s organizational chart in 2010. He cautioned that the Charter should not be a “how to” document; the details of day to day operations should be contained in various approved policies. He said that he would prefer to hear others’ ideas and points of view before forming any concrete ideas of what changes should be made to the Charter; this approach can work to create unity on the team. Mr. Pease asked Mr. Giger to discuss the efficiency versus effectiveness of the current Charter document. Mr. Giger replied that efficiency refers to how something is done, while effectiveness refers to the result. Therefore a process can be effective while not being efficient (fine-tuning can improve this). But an efficient process is rendered moot if it is not effective. Mr. Pease asked who would be considered the “customers” of the Charter document. Mr. Giger said that the customers would include the voters (who must understand the process of government), all the employees, boards and committees. Mr. Harker wondered how Mr. Giger would help to resolve the inevitable internal conflicts that will arise on the CRC and maintain objectivity. Mr. Giger replied that he is not bringing any pre-conceived opinions to the table, and is confident in his ability to remain objective as the process moves forward. If the majority of the group feels a certain way about an issue, and his view is in the minority, he would defer to the majority opinion. He reminded the group that this is a Review Committee; there is no mandate to make changes. *Mr. Giger left the meeting at 7:45 p.m.*

At this point in the meeting, it was determined that the third candidate (Michael McCoy) had not received the email messages informing him of the interview schedule. The group attempted to schedule another meeting to conduct his interview, but were unable to find a date that assured a quorum. Several of the members felt inclined to delay the final choice until they had a chance to meet with Mr. McCoy, but others felt that due to time constraints it would be best to move ahead with an immediate vote.

Mr. Prest moved that the committee vote to choose the CRC designee at this meeting; Mr. Hargraves seconded. The motion failed. The Vote: 3-4-0

Mr. Degen suggested conducting a phone interview with the final candidate.

*Mr. Michael McCoy was interviewed remotely via speakerphone.*

Mr. McCoy introduced himself as a 17-year resident who has not been involved in local government but has always paid attention to the process. He enjoys problem solving and has worked as a manager, a
director and business analyst. Additionally, he previously served on the FinCom in Rehoboth. He categorized the Charter as fundamental to operating the Town. The Charter should reflect the politics of the Town, but eliminate the conflict and ambiguity. Mr. Prest asked if he had any specific changes in mind that he would like to see implemented. Mr. McCoy said that he has no particular agenda, he would prefer to listen to all presented points of view, identify priorities and only then make recommendations for changes. At this point, there is no particular piece of the document that stands out as being obviously problematic. He added that the Town Manager role is useful for centralizing the day to day decision-making, while still leaving power in the hands of the BOS. A community the size of Groton requires too much hands on management to be comfortably addressed by the BOS. Mr. Hargraves asked whether he favors centralized or decentralized government. Mr. McCoy replied that it is best to avoid extremes in either direction. As much as possible, power should be left in the hands of the BOS and the voters, with support from a Town Manager who understands operations and can address issues on an immediate day to day basis. The alternative would cause the BOS to become bogged down in trivialities and end up with less time for creating policy. Mr. Pease asked how the Rehoboth FinCom was seated. Mr. McCoy said that in Rehoboth, candidates were appointed by the BOS after an interview with the FinCom. He added that he was responsible for teaching the FinCom in that Town how to automate their Town budget. His time spent on the FinCom there taught him that Town politics can be rough, even given the neighborhood of places like Groton and Rehoboth. Mr. Green asked whether he would be able to commit to the relatively aggressive meeting schedule that the CRC has adopted. Mr. McCoy replied that his work hours are flexible and he sees no problem with being able to attend all meetings. He asked whether the FinCom were looking for particular criteria for this designee. Mr. Green said that they were hoping to find someone with some fiscal and municipal experience, open-mindedness, vision and the ability to work collaboratively.

On a motion by Mr. Pease, seconded by Mr. Hargraves the Finance Committee voted unanimously to reconsider their previous vote to take a position on the CRC candidates at this meeting. The Vote: 7-0-0

On a motion by Mr. Hargraves, seconded by Mr. Prest, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to choose the CRC candidate at this meeting. The Vote: 7-0-0

The group discussed the merits of each of the three candidates interviewed, then each recorded their top choice on a slip of paper. The votes were tallied by Mr. Green as follows:

Voting for Mr. Giger = Mr. Robertson, Mr. Hargraves, Mr. Manugian & Mr. Prest
Voting for Mr. McCoy = Mr. Green, Mr. Bacon and Mr. Pease

Mr. Green offered to notify all three candidates of the result of the vote. Ms. Dufresne will provide the Town Clerk with the appointment letter for Mr. Giger.

**Charter Review Recommendations** - The group reviewed two sets of charter change documents: the first set originally prepared by Mr. Bacon and a second set which included additional recommendations prepared by Mr. Pease. After a brief discussion, the members decided that Article 2-6(b) (referring to petitions copied to the Chair of the FinCom prior to inclusion in the warrant) should be removed. Mr. Green noted that the procedure is currently not being followed, and as it has not been a problem thus far,
there is no compelling reason to maintain this language. The language included in Mr. Bacon's version of Article 3-2 (d) (recommending a three-person board to appoint Finance Committee members) was deemed appropriate and no further changes were made to the language for this submission. The committee accepted Mr. Bacon's language for Article 6 pertaining to the formalization of an annual review process of the Town's overall financial management policy.

The members made no changes to Mr. Bacon's proposed changes for Article 5-3 (d), referring to the FinCom's collaboration with the Finance Team to prepare and maintain a 5-year financial plan for the Town. However, they agreed to expand on the language describing the reason for the proposed change. Noting that the FinCom's ability to provide guidance during the process of long-term financial planning is even more crucial and valuable than during annual budgeting.

The members discussed at length what the role and responsibilities of the Finance Committee should be relative to the Charter document, both in general and specifically during the annual budget process. Mr. Bacon suggested that the Charter be relied upon to set the tone, rather than to delve into specifics already covered in the Town by-laws. Mr. Degen mentioned that the Charter specifies one role of the Finance Committee which is to bring a balanced budget to Town Meeting annually and to weigh in on any financial matters as presented in other warrant articles. Mr. Bacon wondered if the changes proposed for Article 6 could be presented more simply. Mr. Pease countered that it is crucial for the Finance Committee to "sell" the proposed language changes to Article 6; this article as amended represents the primary thrust for what the Finance Committee needs to accomplish in the Charter and must be argued for strongly to ensure support by the Charter Review Committee.

Mr. Pease agreed to amend the documents as agreed at this meeting, and then to send them to Ms. Dufresne who will distribute them to the committee as a whole for a final review. Mr. Green will provide a deadline for review comments prior to final submission to the CRC.

(Both the original and amended Charter Review Change Submission documents are attached to these minutes as part of the official record).

GDRSD Agreement Review Committee – Mr. Green explained that the FinCom has been asked to elect a representative to serve on the committee charged with reviewing the current Groton-Dunstable Regional School District Agreement. Mr. Hargraves, Mr. Pease and Mr. Robertson all expressed interest in acting in this capacity. Mr. Hargraves offered to withdraw his name in favor of Mr. Pease who has school-aged children. It was noted that Mr. Robertson has a great deal of expertise in this area and has the benefit of serving also on the GDRSD Tri-Board Committee and is deeply familiar with the school budget. Mr. Pease said that he understands the frustrations attendant with the current regional agreement. He has gotten to know the new school administration and would very much like to be involved with helping to resolve some of the district's issues. Mr. Robertson said that as it will be almost impossible to split the district, the Agreement Review effort will have to focus on correcting the problem of perceived inequalities, and thereby make both sides happy. Mr. Pease noted that Dunstable is unwilling to start the funding for the strategic planning that the administration feels is crucial to moving forward, perhaps Groton could find a creative way to help the district move forward. Mr. Green cautioned that dissolving the agreement is unlikely to be the major focus of this review; there are many interesting topics to be addressed including the new SRO, the need to resurface the track at the Middle School. Mr. Hargraves said that it is a very
good thing for Groton that Dunstable has historically been fiscally conservative; Groton could have over-obligated itself in years past without the balancing pressure from Dunstable. Mr. Robertson offered to withdraw his name as Mr. Pease is very strongly committed to serving on this committee.

Mr. Hargraves nominated Mr. Pease as the FinCom representative to the Regional School District Agreement Review Committee. Mr. Bacon seconded that nomination. The Vote: 6-0-1 (Mr. Pease abstained)

Groton Herald Editorial – Mr. Prest expressed his disappointment with the editorial piece in the Groton Herald last week which included a number of inaccurate statements about the Finance Committee. He was concerned that residents were likely to believe what is stated in the local papers. Mr. Robertson mentioned that Mr. Stuart Schulman (Board of Selectmen) had already responded with a letter. Also, Mr. Harris (editor of the Groton Herald) has been asked to research the accuracy of specific statements he had made and to print a retraction if they are found to be inaccurate. Mr. Green felt that only a relatively small sample of residents were likely to read this article and believe it unquestioningly. He would prefer not to validate the article by drawing further attention to it.

Approval of Meeting Minutes –

On a motion by Mr. Pease, seconded by Mr. Prest, the Finance Committee voted in the majority to approve the meeting minutes of August 4th, 2015 as drafted. The Vote: 6-0-1 (Mr. Hargraves abstained)

Mr. Green officially adjourned the meeting at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Dufresne, Recording Secretary
Town of Groton 2015-2016 Charter Review

Charter Review Change Submission

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- Must be received by deadline date of September 18, 2015
- Changes are requested in writing, via email (preferred) or letter to

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  -or-
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- All content of submissions will be available to the public in accordance with the public records law.

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<tr>
<td>Proposed change:</td>
<td>Remove Article 2-6 (b) Referral.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reason(s) for change:</td>
<td>Article 2-6(b) is specifically covering &quot;petitions&quot; sent into the TM for inclusion in the Warrant for a Town Meeting. According to the charter, these petitions are to be copied to the Chair of the Finance Committee. This hasn't happened in the past, and isn't necessary. The Finance Committee is involved early in the warrant process along with the Board of Selectmen, and the Fincom already, by statute, reviews the warrant and gives recommendations. Special/early notice does not provide any value-add to the process.</td>
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**Proposed change:** Change Article 3-2(d) to read as follows: "The board of selectmen shall appoint the town manager, town counsel, a zoning board of appeals and a board of registrars. The chairman of the board of selectmen will participate on a three-person board, with the chairman of the finance committee and the town moderator, to appoint the finance committee."....

**Reason(s) for change:** Align appointment method for the Finance Committee with Finance Committee’s recommended change to the way this committee is appointed (three-person board).
Town of Groton 2015-2016 Charter Review

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Proposed change: In Article 6, insert the following language between Section 6-1 and 6-2: "The Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee shall review and update the town’s overall financial management policy annually, seeking input from the Department of Finance and other advisors."

Reason(s) for change: Establish and formalize annual review of the town’s financial management policy by the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee.
Town of Groton 2015-2016 Charter Review

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<td>Proposed change: Change Article 5-3(d) (Department of Finance) to read as follows: “The department of finance shall collaborate with the Finance Committee to prepare, maintain and present to the Board of Selectmen and Town Meeting a 5-year financial plan for the town.”</td>
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<td>Reason(s) for change: One of the roles (proposed) of the Fincom is to “Serve as principal advisors to the Board of Selectmen, the Town Manager and the Department of Finance on all matters pertaining to the budget, including budgeting strategy and goals, and the balancing of revenues and expenditures.” As a part of this role, the Finance Committee should collaborate in all appropriate fiscal planning for the town, including not only those items associated with the annual budget, but especially in longer term (i.e. 3-year, 5-year and beyond) financial planning, where guidance is far more crucial and valuable.</td>
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**Proposed change:**

- Change roles and responsibilities for the town Finance Committee. Either in Article 6 (Finance and Fiscal Procedure), or in a new article covering appointed committees, please insert a section regarding the following roles and responsibilities for the Finance Committee:

Section 6-1: Membership

1. There shall be a Finance Committee consisting of seven members of the Town, appointed by a three-person committee consisting of the Chairperson of the Board of Selectmen, the Chairperson of the Finance Committee, and the Town Moderator. The members of the Finance Committee shall meet at times to be determined by the Finance Committee. Members of the Finance Committee serve terms of 3 years each, staggered so that the term of office of at least one member is expired each year. The Finance Committee will appoint a chairperson and a vice-chairperson to run meetings and present the Finance Committee's recommendations during the town budget process.

Section 6-2: Roles and Responsibilities

The primary roles and responsibilities of the Finance Committee are as follows:

1. Serve as principal advisors to the Board of Selectmen, the Town Manager and the Department of Finance on all matters pertaining to the budget, including budgeting strategy and goals, and the balancing of revenues and expenditures.
2. Together with the Board of Selectmen, the Town Manager and the Department of Finance, develop a budgetary strategy and set financial goals for each fiscal year.
3. Review and ratify the town's annual budget in accordance with the process described in Article 6, and present the budget for a vote at the spring town meeting.
4. Consult with the Board of Selectmen, the Town Manager and Department of Finance prior to collective bargaining to develop a strategy aligning with the town's long-term budgetary strategy and goals.
5. Review the preliminary results of collective bargaining to ensure alignment with long-term budgetary strategy and goals.
6. The Finance Committee may consider any and all municipal questions for the purpose of making reports or recommendations to the Town.

**Reason(s) for change:**

Currently the Fincom is appointed by the Board of Selectmen. When seeking an alternative approach, the Fincom used research from the 'Finance Committee Handbook', last revised in November, 2008. This handbook is published by the Association of Town Finances Committees (ATFC) which is associated with NAFC. Data revealed that ~64% are appointed by the moderator, 9% (10 out of 110) are appointed by a town's Financial Committee (TFC). The remaining 14% were elected from the town. Prior to the Charette, Fincom members unanimously agreed to being appointed by a 3 member Fincom, two of whom are elected officials, will give the Town of Groton both the appropriate oversight and transparency with fiscal duties, assure fiscal autonomy of the Fincom membership, ensure the Fincom with appropriate authority to carry out the roles and responsibilities defined above, especially in areas of fiscal policy, and eliminate any possibility of patronage.

Roles and responsibilities for the Finance Committee are not spelled out in the current Town Charter. The Fincom is created under Chapter 13 of the Groton Code, currently, yet this section is weak. From a hierarchical perspective, it makes sense to codify the Finance Committee within the Charter rather than by-law, especially as some functions of the Fincom are carried out specifically within section 6 of the Charter. Our proposed changes include the minimum roles and responsibilities the Finance Committee considers essential to execute their responsibilities with respect to the town's annual budget. We recognize that the current charter does not include roles and responsibilities for any appointed committees.

The Finance Committee leaves it to the Charter Review Committee's discretion to (1) consider either adding a new section between Articles 4 & 5, or immediately before Article 4, to describe roles and responsibilities of major appointed committees, and include the above recommended changes in this new section, or (2) incorporate this recommended changes into Article 6, with an appropriate change in line. An example of the new title might be "Town Financial Management" or similar, and the newly expanded Article 6 will capture the membership, roles and responsibilities of the Finance Committee as well as the overall town budgetary process.
Town of Groton 2015-2016 Charter Review

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**Proposed change:** Modify Section 6-2 to read as follows:

[The Board of Selectmen, Town Manager, Finance Team and Finance Committee meet prior to the start of the budget cycle to determine budgetary goals.] Within the time fixed by by-law, but not later than December 31 of the year immediately preceding the year in which the next spring town meeting is to convene, the town manager, after consultation with the board of selectmen, shall submit to the finance committee a proposed, balanced, operating budget for the ensuing fiscal year [that complies with the budgetary goals set forth prior to the start of the budget cycle. The budget shall be submitted along with an accompanying budget message and supporting documents. The town manager shall simultaneously provide for the publication of a general summary of the proposed budget in a local newspaper and the town's website. The summary shall specifically indicate any major variations from the current operating budget and the reason for such changes. The notice shall further indicate the times and places at which the complete copies of the proposed operating budget are available for examination by the public.]

**Reason(s) for change:** The recommended additions/modifications are in [brackets]. This codifies the budgetary goal process to involve Finance Committee, which will help to streamline the annual budget process. The Board of Selectmen currently discuss budgetary goals in open session, and this wording would appropriately involve the Fincom in the discussions. Further, if the budget must comply with the goals, this provides a metric for measurement and decision-making for Fincom's final recommendations to Town Meeting.