

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
MINUTES DECEMBER 7, 2015
APPROVED**

Present: John G. Petropoulos, Chair; Anna Eliot, Vice Chair; Stuart M. Schulman, Clerk; Joshua A. Degen, Member

Absent: Peter S. Cunningham, Member

Also Present: Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant to the Town Manager

Mr. Petropoulos called the meeting to order at 6:01pm and reviewed the agenda.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chief Palma said that we were all living in troubled times and because of that thought it was good to highlight good work. He said that he wanted to commend three officers and two dispatchers for some pretty great work. He said that on November 24th at 9pm the department was alerted by BOLO (Be on the Lookout) for a stolen car that was involved in a robbery in Hudson and Nashua. He said that Sergeant Jason Goodwin observed the car on Hollis Street and began to chase. He said that Officer Omar Connor and Officer Kevin Hennihan assisted in the case as the car went through the downtown and through the country club missing the retaining wall behind the Tavern. He said that Officer Hennihan attempted to use stop sticks and the car went up and around the sticks to avoid them. Chief Palma said that the chase continued down route 119 until the car collided with a telephone pole near Augustine and the suspect fled on foot. He said that the three officers apprehended the suspect after a foot chase and no damage had been caused to anyone's property. He said that the officers acted in the highest standards of the department even during an extremely dangerous situation without further damage or loss. The Chief said that he wanted to commend them.

Chief Palma said that they were not able to be present that night without the dispatchers who took the call and handled the situation calmly and collectively. He said that he would also like to commend Cathy Myers and Sam Welch for acting in the highest regards of the department. He said that he couldn't have asked for better folks to work with.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

1. Mr. Haddad said that the Conservation Commission had a vacancy on its Board caused by the recent resignation of Mary Metzger. He said that the Commission had one applicant interested in serving and after interviewing her the Commission was recommending that Eileen McHugh of Hollis Street fill this vacancy with a term to expire June 30, 2017. Mr. Haddad asked the Board to consider making that appointment. Ms. Swezey said that Ms. McHugh had served on the Commission before. Ms. McHugh said that she served in 1999 and 2000. Ms. Eliot thanked her for offering to come forward.

Mr. Schulman moved to appoint Eileen McHugh to the Conservation Commission with a term to end on June 30, 2017. Ms. Eliot seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Petropoulos said that he asked for this to be on the agenda. He said that he wanted to discuss posting their approved minutes to Talk about Groton and the Groton Herald. He said that this he recently had been reading school committee meeting minutes that were being delivered to his inbox. He said that they were easy to read. He said that the individual that was posting them was seeing 600 views per posting. He said that their webpage sees 80-90 hits a month. He said that they might have an opportunity to post their minutes and have them be viewed more. Ms. Marlena Gilbert said that she had received feedback through Facebook and email and had

people thank her for posting the minutes as it saved people time by having the minutes delivered to their inbox. She said that push notifications would be great also.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT – Cont.

2. Mr. John Amaral said that he was asked to come before the Board to provide an update on the Groton Inn. He said that he was pleased to say they were nearing completion of the modified plan process. He said that it had been a long road but they had a great team. He said that their prior plan approval was for 43 rooms in the Inn plus outbuildings. He said that the approved plan layout took up a substantial amount of the site. Since then there had been a change in ownership which provided them with an opportunity to reach out to several boutique hotel operators in New England. He said that many of the hotel operators knew the history of the Inn and were excited to have an opportunity to be part of the rebuild. Mr. Amaral said that at the end of the day they decided to partner with Migus Group out of Portland, ME. He said that they have 400 employees during peak season and hold 1,000 years of hotel management experience. He said that they will be part of the management team as well as part of the membership team. He said that the new site layout eliminated the outbuildings and brought everything into the Inn. He said that the façade looks like old Inn. He said that the Inn would have 60 rooms and a 90 person function room. He said that the ZBA granted them a height waiver which was crucial. Mr. Amaral said that they want the Inn to be here for another 300 years adding that the new Inn would have the comforts that travelers were looking for today. He said that they achieved a real level of quiet by bringing the mechanicals into the basement with the exception of the condensing unit. He said that a lot of work had been done in 9 months. He said that they were going to HDC and looked forward to working with them on the details. Mr. Amaral concluded by saying that they hoped to commence construction in the Spring of 2016 with an official opening before graduations and Mother's Day in the Spring of 2017.

Mr. Schulman asked if there would be a restaurant. Mr. Amaral said that they would have a 100 seat restaurant, similar to the old carriage house with a stone patio and deck off the back. He said that construction on that building would be happening at the same time as the Inn adding they planned to open at the same time. Ms. Eliot asked if they planned to install the utilities underground on Main Street. Mr. Amaral said that the plan was to run them from the pole underground to the building adding that they needed to talk to the architect about it adding that cost may be an issue.

PERSONNEL BOARD – ANNUAL REPORT

Mr. Robertson called the Personnel Board meeting to order at 6:30pm. All members were present.

Mr. Robertson said that the Personnel Board had been reformed a couple of years ago. He said that they had been working well with the HR Director over the last 18 months and had sat in on some of the Town Manager's hiring searches for various town positions. He said that he thought that the interview processes had been good processes and worked well. He said that the Board had also spent some time working on various policies and procedures with the HR Director. He said that they suggested developing Memorandum of Agreements with the 3 bylaw employees which had recently been approved by the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Robertson said that the Board had also worked on the exit interviews policy. He said that the Board thought it had been a good 18 months. Mr. Robertson said that there had been times when the Board of Selectmen could have / should have involved Personnel Board and were disappointed in a decision made a couple of weeks ago to not involve the Personnel Board in the Town Manager salary survey. He said that they thought this was a great suggestion to have them involved which was later changed and were disappointed that the Board decided that to follow best practice was not the right way for the Town to go. He said that they had a good independent group here that works with the Town adding they continued to look forward to working with Ms. Doig, Mr. Haddad and the Town.

Mr. Degen thanked the Board for their comments adding they provided a great service. He said he didn't believe he was at the meeting Mr. Robertson referenced adding he would have wholeheartedly voted in favor of it. He said that the HR Director had been instructed to get that information and he would like to see it vetted by the Personnel Board before being given to the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Robertson said that he was working on the survey and then then was told to stop. Mr. Petropoulos said that the Selectmen said at a meeting that it wasn't necessary to involve the Personnel Board and because an objection was raised by a board member Mr. Robertson was asked to stop. Mr. Haddad said that he and Mr. Petropoulos met that morning and discussed how best to put the comps together. Mr. Petropoulos said that what they had so far needed some work adding it has gone in a lot of different directions and not in the way of best practice. Mr. Degen said that the Personnel Board was advisory to the needs of the Board of Selectmen and thought they were currently in need of advice from them. Ms. Eliot said that it should have been analyzed at the meeting when it was brought forward and thought it could have been handled better. She said that Mr. Robertson was at that meeting and didn't express comments. She said that she found it hard to make it an issue that it didn't need to be.

Mr. Degen moved that the Board of Selectmen authorize the Personnel Board to work with the HR Director on the Town Manager salary survey in preparation of negotiations with the Town Manager. Mr. Petropoulos seconded the motion. The motion carried 3-0-1 with Ms. Eliot abstaining.

Ms. Sartini said that a member of Board of Selectmen had objected to the work and asked if they could name that person. Mr. Petropoulos said that Mr. Schulman had concerns and was unaware of the sequence of events. Name person. Mr. Schulman said that it was done contrary to the discussion of the Board and wanted it to be aired out at a meeting.

Ms. Doig said that she thought that she and the Personnel Board were working well together. She said that when she needed them they were right there to help. Mr. Haddad agreed adding he also enjoyed working with them. Mr. Petropoulos said that it was good to have business best practices brought to us. He said that they were able to bring senior HR level expertise to our staff.

Mr. Robertson adjourned the Personnel Board meeting at 6:45pm.

FINANCE COMMITTEE

Mr. Haddad said that they had met twice to discuss goals for putting together the FY17 budget. He said that he was asked to try to keep municipal spending to 2.20%. He said that they also had a tri-board meeting that day which provided some insight into the schools financial situation for FY17. Mr. Haddad said that he and the Finance Team spent the last week meeting with all the town departments adding that Mr. Robertson, Mr. Prest, Mr. Schulman, Ms. Eliot and Mr. Cunningham attended those meetings. Mr. Haddad said that the departments were asked to show him what they needed and to keep in mind the goal of 2.20%.

Mr. Green called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:47pm.

Mr. Haddad said that he wanted to provide everyone with preliminary thoughts of what it would take to not exceed 2.20%. He said that within General Government, there is a retirement coming up in the Assessor's Office that they will not fill. He said that in order to make up for some of that lost time, he was planning to increase some hours of current employees in other departments to help not fill that position. He said that he went to the Sewer Commission and asked them to take back the \$27K debt payment for the Pepperell Treatment Plant. He said that they agreed to cover it and will work next year to phase it back in. He said that the Land Use Department budget was seeing a 2.18% increase. Mr. Haddad said that the Protections of Persons and Property budget was a little more challenging. He said that minor increases in the Police, Fire and

Communications budgets would keep it at a 2.55% increase. He said that they were still able to maintain emergency response. He said that within the DPW budget they were proposing a new position which would still keep the overall budget increase to 2.10%. He said that as far as benefits go, it would be a wash with a retirement forthcoming at Town Hall. He said that with the creation of this position, they would be able to reduce overtime at the transfer station adding that the hourly rate would also be less than they were paying at a contractor rate.

Mr. Haddad said that the Library and Citizen Services was the next budget. He said that the Library Trustees had presented their requested budget and were able to demonstrate the need to increase Sunday hours. In doing that, they were also able to demonstrate a decrease in the requirement for books based on the increase in hours. Mr. Haddad said that the Town pays for half of the cost of the Sunday hours and the endowment covers the other half.

Mr. Haddad said that they would also see a reduction in debt service by 100K in FY17. He said that the FY16 budget suggested that they carry the full amount of the debt for the fire protection project, the Four Corners sewer engineering and the radio project. He said that they would be looking to delay permanently borrowing this money until FY19. He said that the reason for this decision was because the Fire Chief had advised him that in FY18 a fire truck is scheduled to be replaced. He said that if they do this, they could permanently finance all these projects at one time. He said that the debt service could be paid for mostly by the pension budget for early retirement that will go away in FY19. Mr. Haddad said that the original plan was to use that money for OPEB liability but said he was changing his mind.

Mr. Haddad said that employee benefits were increasing overall by 6.83%. He said that in the proposed budget he would be carrying a 10% increase in health insurance, a 5% increase in pension and 4 vacancies in the health insurance budget for FY17.

Mr. Haddad said that he was level funding excluded debt for Groton Dunstable Regional as he had not received their numbers yet. He said that he and Mr. Degen met with the tri-board team last week. He said that the schools indicated that they would need \$1M to fund their budget at the current level. He said that 77.61% was Groton's portion and would mean an appropriation of \$776,100, a 5.41% increase. He said that this could be funded within the levy limit. Mr. Haddad said that Nashoba Valley Technical High School's enrollment for Groton students would be 37 students next year down from 39 this year. He said that he was not concerned with carrying 2.5% for them as of right now. Mr. Haddad said that the overall Town budget which included the schools would be increasing by 3.3%. Mr. Petropoulos asked about the levy limit. Mr. Haddad said that they were \$33K under the levy limit. Mr. Haddad said that he stated that he had budgeted \$776,100 for the Groton Dunstable Regional Schools but added that the School Committee was considering a budget of \$3.5M and wanted the Board and Finance Committee to know what the worst case scenario could be. He said that Groton's share of that would be \$2.7M or an overall increase in the budget of 9.14%. Mr. Haddad said that they would need to cut \$1.9M out of Town's operating budget in order to fund the schools within the levy. He said those cuts would eviscerate the municipal budget including major layoffs. Mr. Haddad added that only the Board of Selectmen could put forward an override. Mr. Haddad's proposed budget to the Board and Finance Committee was required by law to be level funded.

Mr. Haddad said that they were currently \$220K under the levy limit and would only be \$33K under the levy limit next year. He said that he was level funding state aid in FY17, he was anticipating an increase in estimated receipts of \$53K adding that some of that was for the light department's share of the new custodial position and the country club also. Mr. Haddad said that there was also the potential for solar field lease money and a PILOT which is not included in his estimates. Mr. Haddad said that he increased ambulance receipts \$225K from \$220K. Mr. Haddad said that the estimated tax rate would be \$19.35 with the proposed

budget within the levy limit. Mr. Haddad asked the Board to take note that the free cash used in FY15 and FY16 was shown in the tax rates. The \$19.35 estimated tax rates for FY17 did not take any free cash that may be used into consideration. He said the overall increase would be 57 cents or \$228 on the average tax bill (average meaning home valued at \$400K). Mr. Haddad said that the Board of Assessors would be doing a full revaluation in 2016. He said that if values increased, the tax bills would be lower. Mr. Haddad said that if an override was required, they would need a \$1,906,000 override. He said that that increase would raise the tax rate by \$1.24 raising it to \$20.59 or another \$124 on every \$100K value.

Mr. Schulman asked what would happen in subsequent years with the school budget. He said that he wanted some confidence that they would not be sitting there in subsequent years looking at trying to find more money. Mr. Haddad said that an override was permanent in subsequent years. He said that the levy limit would increase to \$32M if an override was approved. He said it would be up to the schools to provide them with a definitive plan. He said that the schools were working on a good projection now. Mr. Schulman suggested that when they have unexpected tax capacity they should look at spending it and not save it for future years. Mr. Haddad said that the unexpended tax capacity came in handy this past year. Mr. Degen said that an override would be a tough sell. He said that drill down data would need to be provided. He said that they might be able to get support for an override this year but knowing that their technology plans were not finalized, an override two years in a row would not be successful. He thought that asking for an override now could jeopardize a potential one for next year.

Mr. Degen asked about the need in FY19 for a new fire truck. Mr. Haddad said that an overhaul of the current truck would cost three quarters of the cost of a new fire truck. He said that a new truck is close to a million dollars. Mr. Haddad said that the truck they were discussing was not built for the north and the change in weather thus the reason the Chief didn't think it would be efficient to overhaul it and instead was looking at replacing two trucks with one. Mr. Degen said that he would rather fit the school increases into the levy and not the truck. Mr. Degen asked about a new full-time equivalent within the budget. Mr. Haddad said that they would also be eliminating one position by not filling a retirement. Mr. Degen said that losing employees to maturation could help them.

Mr. Petropoulos asked Ms. Manugian if a steady state maintenance budget of 4.54% would be the kind of annual growth they would be looking at year after year. Ms. Manugian said that the carry forward cost was \$1M / year. She said that 75% of it was personnel related. She said that she didn't think it was out of the ballpark annually. She said that they really needed to at this point communicate their needs to everyone. She said that their estimates didn't include technology and capital and wouldn't know those numbers until May. Ms. Manugian said that unless something changed dramatically, like if the schools grow 4.54% a year and their revenues only grow 3.1% each year they could have a huge problem. Mr. Degen said that he thought the old mindset of 2.5% should be thrown out the window. He said it didn't meet the reality of the Town.

Mr. Haddad said that he needed to put together his budget but asked if 2.2% was still the direction the Bords wanted him to take. The Board of Selectmen was good with 2.2%. Mr. Petropoulos said that he was impressed with the hard work but thought they had work to do in the years to come. Mr. Haddad said that he couldn't have done it without the departments. Mr. Green said that they were meeting about this after the meeting. Mr. Green, Mr. Prest, Mr. Robertson, Mr. Hargraves, and Mr. Manugian were okay with the 2.2% direction. Mr. Pease pointed out the fact that there was a vacancy coming up in the Land Use Department. He asked what the impact was in not filling that as an FTE and dispersing work amongst others. Mr. Haddad said that it was a position that needed to be filled. He said that he consolidated some departments when he started in 2008 with Land Use being one of them. He said that by consolidating and making the position a Land Use Director they improved the delivery of services. He said there could be a savings with a new person. He strongly recommending they keep the position full-time and permanent.

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Petropoulos said that he wanted to consider posting approved Selectmen's minutes on-line to distribution sources. Ms. Eliot asked if that was what the Charter Review Committee had presented to us. She felt it should be up to the media to log into the website to get access to it. She asked if it was their obligation to provide the minutes to a blog. Mr. Petropoulos said that it was their obligation to improve communication to the public as a goal. He said that was all he was asking here. Ms. Eliot said that she was in favor of making things accessible but everything changes from day to day. She said that she didn't want to be committing to other people's technology. Mr. Schulman said that his thoughts would be to link them. Mr. Schulman said that the media's job was to summarize their meetings into a user friendly manner. He said that by the time they approve their minutes it could be a couple of weeks after a meeting. He said that he was not objecting to this idea but thought the value was not the same. Ms. Eliot said that the meetings were also accessible on camera. Mr. Schulman said that he was not excited to put it on Talk about Groton, a site where people express their opinions. Mr. Petropoulos said it would be wonderful to post it in a place that has the most gravitas and where it would hit the most people. Mr. Schulman said that Ms. Marlina Gilbert's minutes are not approved minutes and just her opinion. He said that their minutes were approved and official documents. Mr. Schulman said that anyone could email the link to the press. Ms. Eliot said that it open the office up to people complaining if they don't receive them for one reason or another. Ms. Baxendale said that when inboxes get full she personally ignores things when it gets full. Mr. Petropoulos said that no one was making anyone read anything. Mr. Schulman said that he had no problem doing this he just didn't think it was important. Mr. Petropoulos suggested trying it for 2 months.

Mr. Petropoulos moved that they ask the Town Manager's office to distribute the meeting minutes for one month beginning with the November 7th minutes to Talk about Groton and a number of other common media outlets.

Ms. Eliot asked how they determine who. Mr. Petropoulos said that media sources would come to the Board and request the approved minutes. Mr. Petropoulos added that this be tested for one month and re-evaluate.

Mr. Schulman seconded the motion adding he felt the media should subscribe to what we offer rather than just sending it out.

Mr. Degen said that he was not going to support this motion. He said that he didn't want to open the blog up to a discussion about something that happened in their meeting whereas they don't have the ability to discuss it or comment. He said that they would open themselves up to ridicule or praise if they push it to the webmaster adding there was two different ways of doing it.

Mr. Petropoulos moved to modify his motion that the office distribute minutes to all media outlets requesting minutes for a one month timeframe. Mr. Degen seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

3. Mr. Haddad said that they had all provided their input to the Chair and Vice Chair so that his Goals and Objectives could be finalized for the year. He said that the next step was that the Chair and Vice Chair was to meet with him to set his goals. Mr. Petropoulos said that that was the process and he and Ms. Eliot needed to set up a time to meet with Mr. Haddad. Mr. Schulman said that he was concerned about the fiscal objective as there could be a spike in taxes because of the school and didn't want this held over him as it was out of his control. Mr. Petropoulos agreed that the goals needed to be accomplishable. Mr. Degen added that the goals needed to be finalized by the end of the year.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD

Ms. Ellen Baxendale said that she was asked the week before by someone for directions for the Police Station. She asked if it would be possible to have directional signs put up where it was not on a main road. Mr. Haddad said that he would work on this.

Ms. Judy Anderson said that there was a new restaurant on Main Street. Ms. Eliot said that she had been there was thought it was very good. Mr. Petropoulos said that it was called Roots Café and Bistro. He said they had great coffee and scones.

LIAISON REPORT

Mr. Schulman said that the Charter Review Committee had discussed at their last meeting recommending changing the way the Finance Committee be appointed. It would be a committee consisting of the Chair of the Board of Selectmen, Chair of Finance Committee and the Town Moderator. He said that the group would be the appointing authority. Mr. Schulman said that he voted against it. Mr. Schulman said that another suggestion was to reduce the Board of Selectmen to three. Mr. Schulman said that he thought they were blessed with an exceptional moderator who was respected by his impartially. He said that making him part of this committee to appoint the Finance Committee would make it more political than it is. He said that two others on the Charter Review Committee agreed with him. Mr. Degen said that he also agreed with Mr. Schulman. Mr. Petropoulos said that 80% of Town’s did this through their moderator. Mr. Schulman said that it had been like that since the early times in those towns.

Ms. Eliot said that she and Mr. Schulman met with the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Appeals the week before and thought it was a productive meeting. She said that they gave instructions for Town Counsel to draft changes to non-use, etc. She said that they will continue to work with this.

MINUTES

Ms. Eliot moved to approve the Regular Session meeting minutes of November 9, 2015. Mr. Schulman seconded the motion. The motion carried 3-0-1 with Mr. Degen abstaining.

Mr. Degen moved to adjourn at 8:13pm. Mr. Schulman seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Approved: _____

Stuart Schulman, Clerk

respectfully *submitted*,
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: 1/11/16