

# TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

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*Tuesday, February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2016*

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

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

**Absent:** M. Bacon

**Also Present:** J. Petropoulos (BOS), P. Cunningham (BOS), R. Harris (press), P. Comptois (press), M. Gilbert (resident) J. Anderson (resident) and F. Kolak (resident)

**Documents available at the meeting:** Reserve Fund Transfer Requests – Planning/Police/Mech. Insp.  
2/19/16 Budget Guidance Memo from Town Manager  
GDRSD & Westford School District Budget Comp. (A. Prest)  
Definition of “Consensus” (B. Pease)

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

**Minutes** – On a motion by Mr. Prest, seconded by Mr. Pease, the Finance Committee voted in the majority to approve the meeting minutes from February 13, 2016 (Saturday Joint Meeting with Board of Selectmen: Discussion of FY17 Budget) as amended. The Vote: 5-0-1 (Mr. Manugian abstained as he was not present for that meeting).

On a motion by Mr. Pease, seconded by Mr. Prest, the Finance Committee voted in the majority to approve the meeting minutes from February 18, 2016 (Thursday Joint Meeting with Board of Selectmen: to Revise FY17 Budget Guidance) as drafted. The Vote: 4-0-2 (Mr. Green and Mr. Manugian abstained as they were not present for that meeting).

On a motion by Mr. Robertson, seconded by Mr. Manugian, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to approve the regular meeting minutes from January 26, 2016 as amended. The Vote: 6-0-0

**GDRSD Agreement Review Update** – Mr. Pease informed the group that the committee has lately been working on the following:

- streamlining the agreement document,
- clarifying capital issues,
- defining operational costs and how those conform to DESE codebooks,
- evaluating the assessment and payment deadlines

FY17 Town Operating Budget Scenarios- Mr. Robertson explained that he would like to see the scenarios requested by the BOS (as summarized by the Town Manager in his memo of 2/19/16) adjusted to be more restrictive in nature. The Town Manager's plan to produce a budget limiting Wages, Benefits and Other Expenses to 2.2% growth (over FY16) should also maintain the Wage line at 2.2% growth or less. Similarly, the Town Manager's plan to produce a budget limiting growth in Wages, Benefits and Other Expenses to 0% (over FY16), should also maintain the Wage line at 0% growth or less. For this exercise, Mr. Robertson would like any adjustments in Benefits rates to be ignored. The 10% rate increase initially estimated should stand; any reductions necessary to meet the new targets should be accomplished through eliminating positions or removing insurance vacancies (vacancies here refer to placeholders maintained to allow for new plan subscribers during open enrollment periods or due to a personal qualifying event). Mr. Robertson believes that meeting the new 2.2% growth target should not be too onerous, as the union agreements account for about 1.6% of wage increases for FY17 and merit adjustments account for approximately .7%. Therefore the major contract obligations can be met without deep cuts. Mr. Green was concerned that maintaining an artificially inflated health insurance budget would lead to significant other expense reductions. Mr. Robertson disagreed saying that \$79,000 was already cut from that line; an additional \$20,000 should not be difficult. Mr. Manugian asked whether the Town tends to see large fluctuations in insurance plan enrollment during the year. Ms. Dufresne replied that this is not usually the case, and overall enrollment remains fairly static. Mr. Robertson pointed out that both the school district and the Town are facing the same problem; both entities must determine how to control wage growth or face difficulty in the future.

Mr. Green asked the BOS members in attendance if they had any comments on the changes proposed to the budget scenarios. Mr. Petropoulos replied that further restrictions to what the BOS has already requested does not present a conflict. Mr. Cunningham said that it would be useful to see the impact of these changes, however he is concerned about how these further restrictions can be reconciled with the union contracts currently in place. Mr. Green guessed that this would be up to the Town Manager to resolve. Mr. Delaney pointed out that this will be a difficult target to hit given a 2% salary obligation and the associated merit increases. Mr. Robertson replied that management retains the right to cut hours. Mr. Delaney countered that overtime has already been cut; and it is not possible to use contract workers to perform union tasks as that will result in grievances. He added that increasing wages in his budget allowed a decrease in expenses. If wages are held arbitrarily low, expenses may be forced back up again. Mr. Robertson said that so long as wages are held to the targeted amount, the offset can be expenses or even benefits. The Town Manager will be able to work this out. Mr. Green felt it would be useful to take a look at the data that is returned on these requests and then decide how to proceed. It may not be necessary to adopt the more drastic measures.

Mr. Pease mentioned that his own preference is to adopt a zero growth budget. He would like to stipulate that the scenarios as presented by the Town Manager be sufficiently detailed to allow the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen to fully understand each individual cut and judge its relative impact to the Town. Mr. Robertson said that even if the Town chooses not to make substantial cuts to the municipal budget for FY17, understanding the impact of wage growth will help the Town to avoid overrides on the municipal side in the future. Mr. Delaney maintained that even substantial cuts to the municipal budget will make very little difference to the school district given the magnitude of their needs. He entreated the Finance Committee not to decimate the municipal departments by attempting to balance the budget on the backs of the Town employees. Mr. Hargraves said that no discussion has taken

place regarding decimating the municipal budget to fund the school district. Mr. Delaney contended that requiring 0% wage growth scenarios implies a discussion well underway. Mr. Hargraves said that further discussions will take place with the school district in open session. Mr. Robertson agreed that to meet a 0% growth target would result in cuts of about \$420,000, which will not come close to meeting the school district needs. However, the Town simply cannot continue to grow its budget at 3.2%, or the problem will escalate year over year. Perhaps the Town will choose to continue spending on the current trend, but if this analysis is done, at least there will be an understanding of the implications. Mr. Manugian commended the DPW on the level of service it provides to the Town. He advised helping the Town Manager and the FinCom to understand how best to prioritize the budget cuts in order to minimize the negative impacts.

Mr. Pease felt that if 0% budget growth over FY16 is achieved, he would not make any further restrictions on the way in which it is done. Requiring a simple level-funded bottom-line budget gives the Town Manager some flexibility and provides some latitude for creativity in accomplishing this difficult task. He added that he would not specify whether debt service should be included or excluded, that should be left up to the Town Manager. Mr. Green reminded the group that the Town Manager has been asked to meet these target scenarios without impacting public safety response times. Mr. Pease mentioned that Road Maintenance was discussed as though it would be considered part of that category. Mr. Petropoulos noted that the guidance offered by the BOS regarding public safety impacts may not have been absolutely clear. Mr. Robertson said that the Town Manager can work that out. Mr. Pease said that he was comfortable considering only zero growth scenarios. However, regarding the presentation of that scenario, there would be no reason to detail all the 2.2% cuts separately as, by default, they would be included with the 0% cuts.

**On a motion by Mr. Prest seconded by Mr. Hargraves, the Finance Committee voted in the majority to request FY17 budget scenarios as presented in the Town Manager's memo of 2/19 and amended by Mr. Robertson (to restrict growth of the total wage line to 2.2% and 0% over FY16 while excluding the effect of any beneficial health insurance rate adjustments). The Vote: 5-1-0 (Mr. Pease voted against this motion)**

Sustainable Budget Study Committee – Mr. Green requested nominations for the Finance Committee representative to the Sustainable Budget Study Committee. Mr. Hargraves nominated Mr. Prest, who agreed to serve if he was selected. Mr. Pease said that he would like to enter his own name for consideration, but is concerned about leaving the committee short-handed should he no longer be a member of the Finance Committee after June. The members discussed the procedure by which Mr. Pease could be replaced by another FinCom representative should the need arise. Mr. Robertson felt that it would likely hinder the process if a member must be replaced in June at a time when the other members are already up to speed and fully immersed in their task. Mr. Pease agreed that continuity of participation was critical, and it would not be in the best interests of the Town for him to participate. Therefore he was willing to withdraw his name from consideration.

**Mr. Manugian seconded Mr. Hargraves nomination of Mr. Prest as the Finance Committee representative to the Sustainable Budget Study Committee. The Vote: 5-0-1 (Mr. Pease abstained)**

GDRSD FY17 Budget Proposal – The Finance Committee discussed their availability on Saturday, 2/27/16 for a joint meeting with the Board of Selectmen and the GDRSD School Committee in order to clarify budget issues. It was determined that a quorum would be available on 2/27/16 to meet beginning at 10:30 a.m. The meeting would also be attended by the School Superintendent and the Director of Business and Finance. Mr. Green asked for ideas on how Saturday's discussion should be structured in order to elicit useful information. He noted that the Finance Committee's mission is to provide a recommendation to Town Meeting regarding the school budget and funding plan, but that mission does not include telling the school what to do. He suggested forming a set of criteria that could be applied to the budget data and then discussed. Mr. Pease said that the Town is beholden to the students and those families who are primarily living in Groton so that their children can attend this district. He would ask the following questions: Is the budget sustainable, does it address the whole child, what are the provisions for meeting mental health needs, and is the final budget robust enough to meet all needs. Perhaps each line item could be analyzed based on an identification of the citizen or student need that is being addressed, and whether that need will be met based on the specific provision. Mr. Robertson suggested focusing on the key findings from the Superintendent's Needs Analysis and the success metrics (including a time frame) which should be associated with each. He felt that of even more concern than sustainability is the immediate cost of the school's proposal. The three areas he would focus on for Saturday would be sustainability of this proposal, whether the budget would accomplish the goals noted in the key findings document, and whether success metrics could be applied. Mr. Pease felt that the school district has already accomplished much in terms of defining, measuring and identifying needs. Further analysis should focus on whether the plan would work as laid out, how to allow for future monitoring of the goals identified, and how to track and maintain the gains made now. Mr. Robertson was confident that the school district already has much of this information or they would not have been able to identify their needs to begin with.

Mr. Hargraves expressed concern that the size of the school budget increase will be an enormous burden on the average tax payer. He said that it is important to keep in mind who will ultimately be paying this bill. He pointed out that the Town stepped up to resolve the FY15 school budget crisis, and now the residents will be looking at another large tax increase. He would like the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen to remember that the impact of this request will be felt by the entire population of Groton, not just those using school services. He requested further clarification as to why the school needs are not being addressed incrementally over several years. Mr. Manugian felt it might be useful to have a written timeline detailing when budget tasks must be completed prior to Town Meeting.

Ms. Gilbert (resident) mentioned that certain items in the school needs assessment did not exist 10 years ago. Now the district faces new special needs issues, and has struggled with staff cuts. While it might be easier to phase the funding request over several years, it would require the Town to vote multiple overrides and it is likely that some of these will fail. She suggested that the school district should appoint its own Finance Committee to help them scrutinize and approve their budgets. The fact that the school committee did not always appropriately assess the district Towns does not mean that the children's needs should be neglected. Mr. Prest asked for a list of teachers cut from the school budget since 2006. Ms. Gilbert agreed to provide this information. Mr. Green would like to explore the idea of asking the Town to vote the entire override this year, but to ask Town Meeting to appropriate this amount over several fiscal years. Ms. Anderson expressed concern over the state of the physical plant. She felt that some of the school buildings are in considerable disrepair, which will lead to future financial surprises in coming

years. Mr. Delaney said that he is working with the school district to help them create a capital plan. It will be some time before the plan is completed let alone any funding mechanisms considered. He mentioned that he, too, would prefer the school district to present a more moderate budget request.

Mr. Prest distributed his spreadsheet comparing the Groton Dunstable district with Westford's district. He said that he doubts an override of this size would succeed in either Groton or Dunstable. He still has major concerns about the school budget and whether or not their Best-in-Class arguments are valid. Additionally, student enrollment is declining, making it more difficult to justify some of the proposed spending increases. He noted that Groton spends more per pupil than Westford does, while Westford enjoys lower budget increases. He added that test scores are almost identical between the two towns, however Westford does have lower pupil to teacher ratios. He also would like the school district to provide 5-year budget plans. Mr. Pease argued strongly against accepting the numbers as presented on this comparison as he felt the analysis was flawed due to the lack of comparable data regarding the number of students versus administrators, especially given that Westford's students are more than double the GDRSD population. (A revision of this document was subsequently distributed on 3/7/16 for discussion on 3/8/16). Mr. Green added that he does not find Best in Class comparisons to be particularly useful. He would like to see the success metrics that were mentioned earlier, as well as an analysis of what it is necessary to accomplish and a plan to do so affordably and efficiently. Mr. Manugian noted that this comes down to how to use taxes to purchase services and whether services must ultimately be cut, or maintained in which case taxes must increase. Mr. Green said he would forward a summary of the Finance Committee's requests to Dr. Rodriguez for Saturday's meeting.

Reserve Fund Transfer Requests -

**On a motion by Mr. Hargraves, seconded by Mr. Pease, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to approve a transfer of \$2,000 from the Reserve Fund to FY16 Police Minor Capital to purchase a tactical vest for the SRO. The Vote: 6-0-0**

**On a motion by Mr. Hargraves, seconded by Mr. Manugian, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to approve a transfer of \$9,000 from the Reserve Fund to FY16 Mechanical Inspector Salaries to fund increased inspectional activity. The Vote: 6-0-0**

**On a motion by Mr. Hargraves, seconded by Mr. Pease, the Finance Committee voted unanimously to approve a transfer of 13,846.27 from the Reserve Fund to FY16 Planning Board Salaries to fund the vacation accrual for a retiring employee. The Vote: 6-0-0**

Other Business: Mr. Pease distributed a memo defining the word "consensus" and how he feels it should be used. He added that the members should be careful not to misuse this term when speaking on behalf of the group. Mr. Green replied that the term can be defined simply as the general agreement of a group (according to the Merriam Webster Dictionary).

*Mr. Green officially adjourned the meeting at 8:45 p.m.*

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Dufresne, Recording Secretary

**Patricia DuFresne**

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**From:** Mark Haddad  
**Sent:** Friday, February 19, 2016 12:28 PM  
**To:** Gary Green (ggreen@freetobegreen.com); repbobh1@verizon.net; David Manugian (dmanugian@gmail.com); markjodybacon@verizon.net; Bud Robertson; Barry Pease; Arthur L. Prest (prest@prest.biz)  
**Cc:** Jack Petropoulos (jack.petropoulos@gmail.com); Anna Eliot; Stuart Schulman home; Peter Cunningham-home; Josh Degen-Home; Dawn Dunbar; Patricia DuFresne; Rena Swezey; Michael Hartnett; Melisa Doig  
**Subject:** FY 2017 Budget Guidance

Good Morning Members of the Finance Committee:

In order to assist you at your meeting scheduled for Tuesday, February 23, 2016 in which you will be voting on additional budget guidance for the Town Manager on the FY 2017 Town Operating Budget, I would like to provide you with what guidance was voted by the Board of Selectmen at their meeting of Thursday, February 18, 2016.

Specifically, the Board voted to have the Town Manager provide them with three (3) different budget scenarios as follows:

1. Present a new FY 2017 Operating Budget that accounts for all carry over costs and maintains services at existing FY 2016 Levels.
2. Present a new FY 2017 Operating Budget that limits growth in Wages, Benefits and Expenses at no greater than 2.2% over the FY 2016 Appropriation.
3. Present a new FY 2017 Operating Budget that limits growth in Wages, Benefits and Expenses at 0% (level funded at FY 2016 Appropriation).

In all of these scenario's, debt is not included in the calculation. The Board voted to allow the Town Manager and Town Treasurer to present a plan that is in the best interests of the taxpayers of Groton.

The Board has requested that these budgets be presented to them on Monday, February 29<sup>th</sup>. I would ask the Finance Committee to be available at that meeting as well. Please let me know if you have any questions or need any additional information.

Regards,

Mark

*Mark W. Haddad*  
Town Manager  
Town of Groton  
173 Main Street  
Groton, MA 01450  
(978) 448-1111  
FAX: (978) 448-1115  
[mhaddad@townofgroton.org](mailto:mhaddad@townofgroton.org)

REQUEST FOR TRANSFER FROM THE RESERVE FUND

(To be submitted in triplicate)

Date 2-17-16

Advisory Board  
Town of Groton

Gentlemen:

Request is hereby made for the following transfer from the Reserve Fund in accordance with Chapter 40, Section 6, of the Massachusetts General Laws:

- 1. Amount requested: \$ 9,000.00
- 2. To be transferred to: Mechanical Inspector Salaries  
(give name of appropriation)
- 3. Present balance in said appropriation: \$ 6,100.00
- 4. The amount requested will be used for (give specific purpose):

*Paying for inspectional services*

- 5. This expenditure is extraordinary and/or unforeseen for the following reasons:

*Higher than anticipated inspectional activity.*

*[Signature]*  
Officer or Department Head

Action of Advisory Board

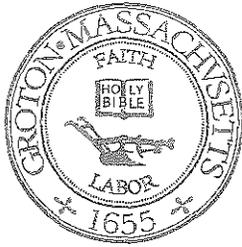
Date of Meeting . . . . . Number Present and Voting . . . . .

Transfer voted in the sum of \$ . . . . .

Transfer disapproved . . . . .

Chairman Advisory Board

Request must be made and transfer voted before any expenditure in excess of appropriation is incurred.



# TOWN OF GROTON

173 Main Street  
Groton, Massachusetts 01450  
(978) 448-1105  
Fax: (978) 448-1113

Office of the  
LAND USE DEPARTMENTS

## MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 17, 2016

TO: Mark Haddad, Town Manager  
Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant

FROM: *mc*  
Michelle Collette, Land Use Director/Town Planner

RE: Reserve Fund Transfer – Mechanical Inspectors

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Please transfer \$9,000 to Account #242 Mechanical Inspectors Salaries for the remainder of FY 2016. The balance in the account was \$6,100 at the end of January. The average amount per month for the Inspectors is around \$3000. The balance in the account should cover February and March, but additional funds will be needed for April, May and June. The costs of the Inspectors' salaries is more than covered by the permit fees.



REQUEST FOR TRANSFER FROM THE RESERVE FUND

(To be submitted in triplicate)

Date 2-17-16

Advisory Board  
Town of Groton

Gentlemen:

Request is hereby made for the following transfer from the Reserve Fund in accordance with Chapter 40, Section 6, of the Massachusetts General Laws:

- 1. Amount requested: \$ 2,100.00
- 2. To be transferred to: Police Minor Capital  
(give name of appropriation)
- 3. Present balance in said appropriation: \$ 3,532.80
- 4. The amount requested will be used for (give specific purpose):  
To purchase Tactical Vest for S.R.O.

- 5. This expenditure is extraordinary and/or unforeseen for the following reasons:  
Standard sized tactical vest recently found to be poor fit for S.R.O.

*[Signature]*  
Officer or Department Head

Action of Advisory Board

Date of Meeting . . . . . Number Present and Voting . . . . .

Transfer voted in the sum of \$ . . . . .

Transfer disapproved . . . . .

\*\*\* Chairman Advisory Board \*\*\*

Request must be made and transfer voted before any expenditure in excess of appropriation is incurred.



GROTON POLICE DEPARTMENT  
Office of the Chief of Police

99 PLEASANT STREET  
GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS 01450



Donald L. Palma, Jr.  
Chief of Police

TEL: (978) 448-5555  
FAX: (978) 448-5601

**CONFIDENTIAL**

To: Mark Haddad, Town Manager  
From: Chief Donald L. Palma, Jr.   
Date: January 21, 2016  
RE: Request for Emergency Purchase

Dear Mark,

As you are aware of the events of this week and last, we were successful in handling a situation that could have had catastrophic results. During the critique and debriefing, it has come to light that our School Resource Officer does not have a tactical vest. This piece of equipment is critical to her safety, as she will most likely be the first to arrive on the scene of any potential situation involving the schools.

We outfitted each marked cruiser with a tactical vest; the vests were sized to accommodate the majority of the department to keep the cost down.

I am therefore requesting an emergency transfer in the amount of \$2000 for the immediate purchase of this equipment. This unexpected expense would have a devastating impact of the department's minor capital budget for the remainder of the year.

I am available to address any questions or concern you or the Board of Selectmen may have.

REQUEST FOR TRANSFER FROM THE RESERVE FUND

(To be submitted in triplicate)

Date 2-22-16

Advisory Board  
Town of Groton

Gentlemen:

Request is hereby made for the following transfer from the Reserve Fund in accordance with Chapter 40, Section 6, of the Massachusetts General Laws:

- 1. Amount requested: \$ 13,846.27
- 2. To be transferred to: Planning Bd. Salary (give name of appropriation)
- 3. Present balance in said appropriation: \$ 13,768.76
- 4. The amount requested will be used for (give specific purpose):  
To Fund Vacation accrual pay - out for retiring employee

5. This expenditure is extraordinary and/or unforeseen for the following reasons:

Retirement was not anticipated when FY16 budget was set.

*[Signature]*  
Officer or Department Head

Action of Advisory Board

Date of Meeting ..... Number Present and Voting .....

Transfer voted in the sum of \$ .....

Transfer disapproved .....

.....  
Chairman Advisory Board

Request must be made and transfer voted before any expenditure in excess of appropriation is incurred.

Michelle Collette Vacation Buy Back

Current hours accrued in system as of PW16                      340.84 hours X 38.87 = \$ 13,248.45

to be accrued PW17    7.69 hours X 38.87 = \$ 298.91

to be accrued PW18    7.69 hours X 38.87 = \$ 298.91

Total Vacation Buy Back    356.22 hours X 38.87 = 13,846.27  
to be paid out in PW17 2/25/16

HR Signature Michelle Don    Date: 2/19/16  
Accounting Signature Robert Rippe    Date: 2-22-16  
Town Manager Signature \_\_\_\_\_    Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Entered in Payroll System by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Consensus defined.

Consensus is NOT compromise. Claiming consensus is not appropriate when a team wishes to find an expedient way to stop discussion and come to a vote. Consensus takes time. Consensus requires perspective and an open mind.

Consensus is not a concept to be used lightly. Consensus in government will be rare.

Consensus depends on the team having a shared vision, value and goals. It requires agreement on both the specific issue and overall direction.

Consensus implies that everyone *accepts* and *supports* the consensus decision, and understands the reasons for making it.

Consensus then infers a collective responsibility. Collective responsibility requires that every member of the group, without regard to an individual's participation in decision making or his/her position/rank, support, uphold, and push to achieve the consensus decision/goals.

Words have power and meaning, and consensus has tremendous weight. Not knowing the true definition of consensus is understandable, and this document serves to remedy this. We all must recognize that misusing the term 'consensus' undermines the very fabric of team dynamics.

Prepared by: Barry A. Pease

Member, Finance Committee

February 13, 2016