

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING  
JOINT MEETING WITH FINANCE COMMITTEE AND SCHOOL COMMITTEE  
MINUTES MARCH 16, 2016  
APPROVED**

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

**Finance Committee Members Present:** Gary Green, David Manugian, Art Prest, Barry Pease, Bud Robertson, Mark Bacon, Bob Hargraves

**School Committee Members Present:** Jeff Kubick, Alison Manugian, Jon Sjoberg, Peter Cronin, Leslie Lathrop, Jennifer McKenzie

**Absent:** Peter S. Cunningham

**Also Present:** Mark W. Haddad, Town Manager; Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant; Patricia Dufresne, Town Accountant

Mr. Petropoulos, Mr. Green and Mr. Kubick called their meetings to order.

Mr. Petropoulos said that the objective of this meeting was to focus on how they go about an override process. He said that he envisioned them talking about scenarios, agreeing upon a methodology and maybe strategizing but with no more specificity than that. Mr. Green said that this discussion would be assuming that they had already voted on their proposed budget. He said that he wanted to further add to what Mr. Petropoulos said by adding that they should stay away from talking about numbers at this point we would have voted on our proposed budget. Mr. Petropoulos asked that people stay away from talking about numbers at this meeting.

Mr. Haddad said that under any of these scenarios an override would be before the voters no matter what happened at Town Meeting. He said that only the Selectmen could put an override question on the ballot adding they would need to decide what that wording was and what that number was based on the final budget determined by the Finance Committee. He said that the school budget voted could not be changed by anyone but the School Committee. Mr. Haddad said that he got together with Mr. Degen, Mr. Petropoulos and the Town Clerk and came up with four different scenarios to which he was going to review and discuss.

1. The first option was to have the municipal budget with GDRSD needs assessment presented and voted on at Town Meeting on April 25th. The override vote would be brought to the Town Election on May 17th and second night of Town Meeting would be held on May 23rd.
2. The second option was to have the municipal budget with GDRSD needs assessment presented to April 25th Town Meeting, but not voted on. The override vote would be brought to the Town Election on May 17<sup>th</sup> and the final vote on the budget would happen on May 23<sup>rd</sup> at the second night of Town Meeting. No motions to reconsider would be needed with this option.

Mr. Petropoulos as what the tactical reason to not vote the budget was. Mr. Haddad said that if you wait until the second night of Town Meeting you would know what the override vote was. Mr. Petropoulos said that voters could block the reconsider vote if not voted on until the second night of Town Meeting. Mr. Sjoberg said that in scenario 2, this would be the first time the school committee's budget would be voted.

3. The third option would be for Town Meeting to vote on 2 budgets on April 25<sup>th</sup>.
  - a. First budget - Municipal budget, including GDRSD carryover budget all within the levy limit.
  - b. Second budget - Municipal budget, including GDRSD needs assessment, contingent on override vote.

Mr. Green asked if 2 budgets needed to be voted. Mr. Sjoberg said that they could come in with one budget and go back and revote on another.

4. The fourth option would be for Town Meeting to vote on 2 budgets at the Town Meeting on April 25<sup>th</sup>.
  - a. First budget - Modified Municipal Budget, Including GDRSD "Carryover" Funding, Within the Levy Limit
  - b. Full Municipal Budget, Including GDRSD Needs Assessment, Contingent upon Override Vote

Mr. Haddad reviewed a flow chart for scenario one. Mr. Kauppi asked if they would need a motion to reconsider if the School Committee voted a new budget in advance. Mr. Haddad said if the override failed they would be out of balance and the BOS would have to decide if they wanted to call for another override vote. He said if the override failed the BOS and Finance Committee would have to decide what they wanted to do to obtain a balanced budget. Mr. Degen said that if the override question passed at the ballot they would be able to complete the remaining town meeting business. He asked who would call for the joint meeting if Dunstable did not pass the budget. Mr. Haddad said that the School Committee would call for the joint meeting. Ms. Manugian said that the School Committee would choose a moderator. Mr. Kauppi said if the voters didn't go along with adjourning to the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May, they may want to, by amendment, debate this and make changes as they wish. Mr. Haddad said that with any one of these scenarios the Town Meeting has to choose to vote.

Mr. Pease asked how long it would take to post another Town Meeting. Mr. Haddad said 14 days. He said that they could start without a balanced budget but it had to be balanced by November. He said that in order to get a two vote system in, this scenario allowed for that.

Mr. Robertson said that they had to stay in sync. He said that the Town of Groton put another \$400K up front. He said if Dunstable didn't pass the override, their (Groton's) levy limit would have to have more money available for the schools so it would work. Mr. Haddad said that if Groton passed the budget that Dunstable did not pass they would have to go back to Dunstable again and then hold a district wide meeting.

Mr. Petropoulos said that he was still unclear even though he helped put this together. He said that they needed to get the message out there as simplified as possible. Mr. Bacon said that this was complex enough that we want to keep the choices as simple as possible. He said that Scenario 3 might be the easiest adding it had been done before. Mr. Green agreed that it needed to be simple and straight forward but believed that Scenario 1 determined what the recommended levels were and what they support. He said that if they supported this at Town Meeting and at the ballot box that would be easy. He said that if it was not supported, it would be up to the School Committee to do what they needed to do. Mr. Degen agreed with Mr. Green adding they needed to get down to the weeds to answer what ifs. Mr. Degen said that with Scenario 1, this was what would happen and the path would be determined by the school committee. Mr. Pease said it was not wise to plan like they could control town meeting. He said they could say they like Scenario 1 but Town meeting may change that. Mr. Haddad said that nothing would prevent a rat hole. Mr. Green said that Scenario 1 was the opposite adding this was what they wanted to do and what would happen. Mr. Kauppi said that he was not there to give advice on how to proceed but wanted the Boards to know that a motion to postpone to a time certain outranks a motion to amend.

Mr. Petropoulos said that Scenario 1 left them uncertain until after the override question was presented at the ballot. Mr. Haddad said that they would have an adopted budget but it would be out of balance. Mr. Petropoulos said that the terms they were using really didn't mean anything. Mr. Haddad said that with Scenario 1 the entire budget was contingent on an override. He said with Scenario 4, the Town budgets would

be reduced but the override would still be \$1.9M. He said that in this example the Town would receive \$200K and school would receive \$1.7M.

Mr. Burke said that all roads lead to the vote. He said Scenario 1 teases that all out but they run the risk of the override failing. Ms. Manugian said that she expressed support for Scenario one adding it was the clearest to layout as they move along. Mr. Bacon said that he had a couple of kids who attended school here and deeply appreciated good schools and education. He said that they needed to think about what would happen if the override didn't pass. He said that he was convinced that the schools had been underfunded for several years but didn't think it was prudent to make up for everything in one pass. Mr. Bacon said he didn't think there was as much support for an override as everyone might have thought.

Mr. Degen said that Scenario 1 was the clearest joint vision. He said that in the event of success at the ballot box this allowed the Town to speak their minds. He said that the School Committee could come back and decide to stick with that number or go with a different approach like a phased implementation. He said that they could cross that bridge when they get there. Mr. Manugian said that he supported Scenario 1 also adding they share the burden as taxpayers or share pain as a community with this option.

Mr. Haddad said that the final override number would be decided once the Finance Committee made their decision. If they made no further changes, he said it would be \$1.899M. Mr. Petropoulos said that the School Committee controlled what scenario they used here. Mr. Haddad said that the Finance Committee controlled the motion that goes on the floor of Town Meeting. He said that they could move two budgets on the floor of Town Meeting. He said that when they brought an override forward in 2010, both motions were approved. Mr. Haddad said that in 2010 the School Committee went back after the override failed and voted to reduce their assessment. He said they couldn't go up but could go down adding he too thought Scenario 1 was the best scenario.

A resident said that the Dunstable component was not being discussed and how it would affect their budget. Mr. Haddad said that it was a two-step process adding that Groton and Dunstable had to accept the assessment. He said that the School Committee could force the rejecting town to a second vote. He said that if that failed, the district wide meeting would be called by the School Committee. The same resident asked about timeframes for both Town's meetings. Mr. Haddad said that both Groton and Dunstable Town Meetings and Elections were at about the same time. The same resident asked how long they needed to call for a district meeting. Mr. Haddad said about 14 days. Ms. Manugian added that if a budget was not approved the state would step in and cut the budget into 1/12 of last year's appropriation and that's what they could spend monthly.

Mr. Cunningham asked if there was a scenario where the budget was not approved or approved. Mr. Kauppi said that that would happen if the budget didn't come up the first night of town meeting. Ms. Manugian said that in Scenario 1 they were moving forward with some sort of a budget. Mr. Prest said that if they passed Scenario 1 at Town Meeting and it passed at the Groton ballot but Dunstable did not pass it, he asked if that meant they don't have a budget in place. Mr. Haddad said that Groton would be done. He said that they would have a municipal budget in place but the Schools would not have a budget. The School Committee would go back to Dunstable and ask them to reconsider the budget. There would be two options if it was rejected again; either vote to lower the assessment or School Committee could decide to call district wide meeting. Groton's budget would still be in place. Mr. Degen said that if the School Committee did not call for a district wide meeting they would need to vote at the Fall Town Meeting to lower the budget and vote an underride. Mr. Green agreed adding that if they wanted to then go with a phased in approach the levy limit would be in place already.

Mr. Green said he felt as though they have a consensus around Scenario 1. Mr. Haddad said that he needed the Boards to make a decision within the next week so he could go to print with the warrant on time. Mr. Petropoulos said that he wanted to provide the public time to comment on this. Mr. Degen said he wanted to hear the School Committee's recommendation and what they would like to see. Mr. Degen said that Scenario 1 was a true shared override adding he thought it was an injustice not to move forward with Scenario 1.

*Mr. Pease moved that the Finance Committee support Scenario 1. Mr. Bacon seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

*Mr. Schulman moved that the Board of Selectmen support Scenario 1. Mr. Degen seconded the motion.*

*Ms. Manugian moved that the School Committee support Scenario 1. Mr. Sjoberg seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.*

*The Board of Selectmen voted 3-0-1 in favor of Mr. Schulman's motion with Mr. Petropoulos abstaining citing needing more time.*

Mr. Haddad said that he met with Mr. Kubick earlier that day. He said in his calculations he had used a 3% annual increase to the schools when they were seeing a 4.7% annual growth rate to maintain. He said that he did a five year projection with a school increase of 4.7% and municipal wages in FY18 at 2.3% and in FY19-22 a 2% increase in municipal wages. Mr. Degen asked what the carryover number was. Mr. Kubick said that 4.7% was what was needed for carryover costs.

Mr. Schulman asked about using some money from cap stab to fund the budget. Mr. Haddad said that they could but said you could but would recommend against it. He said that they couldn't support a 4.7% budget increase annually without overrides and without the State stepping up and providing more in aid. Ms. Rodriguez said that the Foundation Review Commission was going to be looking at this further. She said that Representative Harrington was advocating for 80% reimbursement of Chapter 71. Mr. Green said that there were challenges around 4.7% adding it would be important through town meeting to discuss this honestly. He said that he wanted to work with the administration and School Committee to come up with a specific list of action items in an attempt to bring down the need for a 4.7% annual increase. Ms. Manugian said that this was a conversation they could and should have. She said that the schools had been reducing for so many years already that the mere supposition that 4.7% could be reduced was objectionable to her. Mr. Green said that he thought they should be able to come up with a list of things. Mr. Petropoulos said that he thought to say there was no room for improvement in the school budget was a bad thing right now. He said that the public needed to know they had not stopped trying. Mr. Degen said that over the course of the next five years according to the projections, they would be facing a \$7M shortfall even with an override. He said that the capital and technology budgets had not even been discussed yet and were not factored in those numbers. He strongly suggested that the School Committee form a Sustainable Budget Committee like the Town was doing on the municipal side adding they all had a responsibility to the tax payers. Mr. Sjoberg said that Ms. Manugian was speaking for herself adding he thought it was something they should discuss. Mr. Kubick said that they also needed to focus on the state level as Chapter 70 had been flat for the past 10 years adding that's where their problems were. He added that their budget was only progressing at 3.2% annually.

Mr. Prest talked about the Towns of Mendon and Upton and how they faced an 18% override last year because they were short on minimum contributions in previous years. He said that they committed to having no increases above the 2.5% levy limit for five years. Mr. Green said that if they wanted the voters to vote for this they had to discuss the 4.7% annual increase.

A resident said that the Boards needed to take into consideration the programs that had been cut along with the fact that they were losing people who live here and those that wanted to live here but don't because they were not funding what the schools needed. Ms. Faye Raynor, a resident argued that there was a systemic issue that had finally been recognized and asked how long it would take to come up with a long term plan. Mr. Robertson said that the override was important but was not the real issue. He said that they were not getting the revenue. Mr. Pease said that they had defined the fact that there is a problem adding that the next step was to analyze it which takes time. Mr. Petropoulos said it was hard to put an artificial timeline on that adding they would see progress over the next year. Mr. Green said that they had made progress working together this year but needed to continue to work on this over the next 12 months. Mr. Prest pointed out that 25% of residents in Town were seniors who were not seeing an increase in their social security this year. He said that 60% of the residents in Town didn't have children in the school system adding that increase taxes wasn't solving the problem that was facing them. He said that the Sustainability Committee will have to wrestle with it over time. Mr. Degen said that this wasn't just a problem in Groton; it was a nationwide problem.

The meeting adjourned at 8:04pm.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Stuart Schulman, Clerk

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respectfully *submitted*,  
Dawn Dunbar, Executive Assistant

Date Approved: BOS Approve Minutes on 5/2/16