

TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

Regular Session

Friday, March 22, 2019 at 7:00 am
Town Hall First Floor Meeting Room
173 Main Street, Groton, MA 01450
Approved 04/29/19

Present: G. Green (Chair), C. Doody, D. Manugian (Clerk), A. Prest, B. Robertson,
Attending by phone: S. Whitefield

Also Present: P. Dufresne (Town Accountant), M. Haddad (Town Manager), Tom Delaney (Department of Public Works), S. McCurdy (Fire Chief), M. Luth (Police Chief)

Not Present: L. Leonard

Chairman Green called the Finance Committee session to order at 7:00 am.

Updates on FY20 Operational and Capital Budgets – Specific Emphasis on Public Safety Budgets/Capital, DPW Budgets/Capital, Grant Revenue

Groton Fire Department Chief Steele McCurdy was in attendance along with other members of the fire department. The committee discussed the fire department getting bids to replace Engine 3 and bringing this to Spring Town Meeting. The fire department is currently getting bids estimated around 600-650K. They would finance with a BAN and make payments over several years. They anticipate a total cost of \$140k year with payments made from ambulance funds when possible. B. Robertson inquired on other large projects. C. Doody inquired on what happens to the old trucks to which he was answered there will be an auction for Engine 3 and the rescue truck.

On a motion by D. Manugian, seconded by B. Robertson, the finance committee VOTED unanimously to bring the replacement of Engine 3 to the Town Meeting (\$650k). The Vote (6-0-0): Robertson – Aye, Green – Aye, Prest – Aye, Doody – Aye, Whitefield – Aye, Manugian- Aye.

The fire department also discussed the need for replacing their pickup truck. It is a service vehicle, used for things like medical calls and plowing. It needs repairs and it has been determined that it would be better to replace it. B. Robertson asked the year of the vehicle. It is a 2011 truck. The replacement would be paid for out of ambulance receipts (approximately \$60k).

On a motion by D. Manugian, seconded by B. Robertson, the finance committee VOTED unanimously in favor of bringing the purchase of a replacement pickup truck to the Town Meeting (\$60k). The Vote (6-0-0): Robertson – Aye, Green – Aye, Prest – Aye, Doody – Aye, Whitefield – Aye, Manugian- Aye.

TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

Regular Session

T. Delaney, Department of Public Works Superintendent discussed the proposal for the town to upgrade two current pieces of mowing equipment to a more versatile single piece of equipment. This new piece of equipment would have attachment pieces that have several uses. T. Delaney has spoke to GELD who is willing to pick up \$200K toward the purchase as they would use this equipment for clearing areas under power lines. The purchase of this equipment would also mean there would be one piece being insured and registered, as opposed to insuring and registering multiple pieces of equipment. T. Delaney also expressed the need for a replacement generator in the highway garage. GELD has also committed \$150K toward a larger generator. T. Delaney commented that GELD has been historically collaborative with the DPW. In this case, they would help the town by running the generator at peak periods to the grid to result in lower rates.

On a motion by B. Robertson, seconded by D. Manugian, the Finance Committee VOTED unanimously to recommend the purchase of a Rubber Tire Excavator to Town Meeting (\$140,000). The Vote (6-0-0): Robertson – Aye, Green – Aye, Prest – Aye, Doody – Aye, Whitefield – Aye, Manugian- Aye.

T. Delaney and the committee members briefly discussed the dump truck in use by the DPW. The town keeps dump trucks for approximately 18 years. Last year was the first \$40K payment for the current truck which was financed through a State House Note to be paid off over five years.

On a motion by B. Robertson, seconded by D. Manugian, the Finance Committee VOTED unanimously to recommend that Town Meeting authorize \$40k from Capital Stabilization to be used to pay FY20 debt service on the DPW Dump Truck. The Vote (6-0-0): Robertson – Aye, Green – Aye, Prest – Aye, Doody – Aye, Whitefield – Aye, Manugian- Aye.

Dispatch Center Improvements

The committee along with Chief Luth discussed the need for improvements to the dispatch center as the current design is not adequately conducive for two people to be working in the center. They have begun the planning stages and anticipate that the improvements will occur over three separate phases. The first would be an upgrade to dispatch equipment, second will be purchases of larger equipment and third would be to redesign office space for ADA compliance with the use of a designer. As they are considering the budget, it is anticipated that the department may need an additional \$60k in funding. Out of the \$60k they have from FY18, \$43,788 remains. They also have \$60k that was voted for FY19. They anticipate the third phase will be the costliest. They are applying for 911 grants which they could consider using to offset these expenses. A temporary dispatch center will have to be set up during construction, which will be an additional expense. M. Haddad added that the department should know in May or June regarding the status of grant funding. D. Manugian suggested the scope of projects may change depending on the funding awarded. The department also has some other anticipated capital projects, including building a secure garage for hazardous equipment, which will include a security system. There is also some planned maintenance for the police station, including painting/siding the exterior and roof repairs. Most of this can be managed by T. Delaney and the DPW.

TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

Regular Session

On a motion by A. Prest, seconded by D. Manugian the Finance Committee VOTED unanimously to recommend the additional \$60k in funding for dispatch center improvements. The Vote (6-0-0): Robertson – Aye, Green – Aye, Prest – Aye, Doody – Aye, Whitefield – Aye, Manugian- Aye.

On a motion by B. Robertson, seconded by A. Prest the Finance Committee VOTED unanimously to recommend the FY20 police station improvements (\$20k). The Vote (6-0-0): Robertson – Aye, Green – Aye, Prest – Aye, Doody – Aye, Whitefield – Aye, Manugian- Aye.

M. Haddad updated the committee on the DPW Garage project. Bids are out this week and they are getting many responses. He informed the group that the select board recently voted 4:1 to bring the hiring of two firefighters to vote at the upcoming town meeting. The estimated costs of adding these two employees would be \$117- \$118k when considering health plans and wages.

Because this year the town has a snow and ice deficit that can be resolved with a transfer from Overlay Surplus, the budget would technically be \$180k under the levy limit. B. Robertson commented that he is unsure if he is in agreement with seeking an override this year. It would be difficult to justify such a request to taxpayers (as well as the proposed cuts to services) while the town budget is \$180k under the levy limit. Chairman Green commented that without an override this year, the town could be facing a \$750k deficit next year. A list of cuts has already been proposed and the two fire positions may be in peril next year.

Fire Department Chief S. McCurdy discussed his concern that the fire department is on trend to becoming a broken department. In his experience with other towns, Groton on-call officers and EMTs are beginning to show signs of burnout. The number of on-call officers has decreased to around 36 currently, which is down from about 60 in 2010. Within the current on-call officers, some are getting ready to retire. At his former position in Littleton, Chief McCurdy described a sign of burnout being a lower response rate to nighttime calls. Use of incentives did help the situation. Chairman Green inquired if incentives were an effective program if they were eventually showing signs of burnout, to which Chief McCurdy answered it was the strategy that was needed at the time.

Chairman Green asked for a fuller explanation regarding the reduced number of on call officers. Chief McCurdy answered that besides the upcoming retirements, the younger generation of on-call officers often do not make it past 5 years. This can be because of finding work elsewhere, transferring to fire departments out of town, or family commitments. He added that this is a nationwide issue. He expressed that adding the two full time firefighters this year helps offset the decline down the road. A. Prest discussed writing a letter to the Select Board regarding the override. He also commented on the lowered response times and its effect on mortality. It was discussed how often the town relies on mutual aid. There is no revenue from mutual aid, however emergency revenue does not have a big impact on the operating budget. J. Degen (Select Board) expressed that he would like to see the fully loaded \$117k used to describe the impact on the budget of the two firefighters, instead of using the \$64k net cost. M. Haddad was in agreement that the fully loaded figures should be used when explaining the proposal at Town

TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

Regular Session

Meeting. C. Doody inquired if the additional firefighters result in 24/7 coverage, to which Chief McCurdy answered yes; it will mean there will be 2 people in the station at any given time. Chairman Green inquired if the 24/7 coverage helps resolve the on-call issue. Chief McCurdy expressed that how the on-call firefighter situation progresses will determine the needs of full-time firefighters. Other situations to factor in include the opening of the Indian Hill performance center. There will need to be ambulance presence at each performance. This is a source of revenue but there is a potential need for additional staff.

On a motion by A. Prest, seconded by B. Robertson the Finance Committee VOTED unanimously to recommend the hiring of two full time firefighters to Town Meeting. The Vote (6-0-0): Robertson – Aye, Green – Aye, Prest – Aye, Doody – Aye, Whitefield – Aye, Manugian- Aye.

Additional comments: Chairman Green commented that he appreciated the information on preventing emergency call burnout and thanked Chief McCurdy and the fire department for their input. C. Doody also made the comment that employee burnout was not emphasized in the final report. There was a focus on 24/7 coverage.

M. Haddad commented that with funding for GDRSD, Nashoba Tech and the firefighters, we are 180k under the levy limit. The committee discussed some budget reductions that resulted in around \$26k in savings. These include reduced spending for senior van transport, saving \$10k. The police department dog will be funded through private donations, saving \$3k. Also, an expected reduction in Health Insurance enrollment for FY20 should provide for a savings of about \$13k. It was noted that the senior van budget cut reflects reduced spending, not a limitation on services.

The committee discussed the School Committee's use of E&D to cover operating costs. T. Delaney suggested that the finance committee send a letter to the school committee to express their concern with this impact. M. Haddad discussed that the school committee is actively working on cost savings measures.

On a motion by B. Robertson, seconded by D. Manugian the Finance Committee VOTED in favor of recommending three changes to the budget: reducing Police Expenses \$3k, reducing COA Van Expenses \$10k, and reducing Health Insurance \$13k. The Vote (6-0-0): Robertson – Aye, Green – Aye, Prest – Aye, Doody – Aye, Whitefield – Aye, Manugian- Aye.

Other comments: D. Manugian commented that in summary, an override for FY20 would be viewed as funding for firefighters while an FY21 anticipated override would be viewed as a school override. C. Doody expressed that he is uncomfortable with a \$750 k override next year, and is more comfortable with requesting a smaller override this year to offset a larger ask in FY21. S. Whitefield inquired if an override request this year adversely affects the chances of a successful override next year. He expressed his concern with how to effectively message this to the community and is also fearful of next year being viewed as a school override. The committee members discussed the need for using this year's Town Meeting to prepare and explain to the community what is to come. M. Haddad expressed his optimism for the tri-board committee process. Chairman Green commented that the Finance Committee's goal is to get to a balanced budget. If the Select Board is not satisfied, they can recommend changes. M. Haddad noted that at this point there are many unknowns. D. Manugian commented on the Pepperell sewer,

Commented [NCS1]: Is the proposed over \$450k?

TOWN OF GROTON FINANCE COMMITTEE

Regular Session

suggesting that \$25k be cut from the budget in FY20 and added to excluded debt. P. Dufresne replied that the DOR Legal Department is not comfortable issuing guidance one way or the other about excluding another Town's debt service. They will be meeting to discuss this issue in the near future as other municipalities have questions about this topic. M. Haddad commented that he would like a recommendation from the FinCom by April 8th so that the warrant can be submitted to the printer on April 9th.

Upon a motion by B. Robertson, seconded by D. Manugian the committee VOTED in favor of adjourning this morning's meeting (9:00 a.m.). The Vote (6-0-0): Robertson – Aye, Green – Aye, Prest – Aye, Doody – Aye, Whitefield – Aye, Manugian- Aye.

Minutes respectfully submitted on April 12, 2019 by Naomi Campbell Siok, per diem recording secretary, Town of Groton.

Commented [NCS2]: I got this one.